Open Theism, Analogy and Religious Language

Joseph M. Holden, PhD

The examination of historical antecedents in the previous chapter leads us to ask an important fundamental question: What crucial change has led to replacing the classical concept of God's nature for an unorthodox understanding of him in the modern age? In this chapter, I will argue that this change was sparked when modernity abandoned the Thomistic view of the doctrine of analogy and embraced the notion that being is univocal. Therefore, this change has essentially removed the means of differentiating between infinite and finite beings, thus leading to a view of religious language that can only be understood in hyper-literal ways. It is my contention that open theism has essentially characterized this change and has formulated a modern theology of God that is alien to orthodox Christianity through the employment of theological methods that use the univocity of being as their starting assumption. Subsequently, this has lead to their aberrant understanding of religious language. Therefore, in this chapter, I will examine and evaluate the openness approach to religious language.

Open Theism and Religious Language. Crucial to the open argument that frames God's nature in the nontraditional context of change, limitation and temporal relationships is their unique understanding of biblical language. Scripture offers texts that communicate various creaturely characteristics to God including hands, arms, ears and even describe him in terms of possessing human limitations such as forgetfulness, uncertainty, risk and injury. Open theism has approached these passages, which have been traditionally understood as employing anthropomorphic language when referring to God, in a novel and controversial way, resulting in a radically different model of God. Richard Rice describes the foundational importance of understanding texts in a manner advocated by open theism when he asserts:

> Most Christians rightly construe such descriptions as symbolic and deny that physical form and features characterize the divine being itself. The question is whether we should do the same with references to God's thoughts and feelings. If physical descriptions of the divine reality are not to be taken literally, is the same true of descriptions of God as deliberating, deciding, acting and feeling? To avoid turning God into an enlarged human being, must we deny not only that God shares our physical properties but our intellectual, volitional and emotional properties too?....It is difficult to see what, if anything, would remain of the idea of God in the wake of such sweeping denials. They

would deprive it of any meaningful content. If human beings and God have nothing whatever in common, if we have utterly no mutual experience, then we have no way of talking and thinking about God and there is no possibility of a personal relationship with him.[1]

Rice maintains that some form of "commonality" must exist between God and man; otherwise, an undesirable agnosticism and non-relational deity would surely develop, which is something both classical and open proponents seek to avoid. Classical theology has always agreed with this, however, and the open debate about biblical language has reached the breaking point as reflected in Rice's comment that scriptural "descriptions of God's thoughts and feelings" should be taken "at face value….We can accept at face value the biblical statements that attribute powerful emotions to God. We do not have to dismiss them as 'anthropomorphisms' or 'anthropopathisms', which have no application to his real life. The open view of God does justice to a broad spectrum of biblical evidence and allows for the natural reading of the Bible".[2] In Gregory Boyd's *God of the Possible*, he suggests that passages that describe God as changing, being limited in knowledge, repentant, regretting and learning should be interpreted "straightforwardly", "just as literally", "every bit as literally" and "at face value", just like passages that depict a closed future.[3] Rice sees great difficulty with the traditional approach to this kind of passage since it necessitates eliminating the "plain import" of, for example, texts that apply "change" and "repentance" to God.[4] For Rice, his approach is seen to offer the best of both worlds since it allows for:

> …attributing change and changelessness to different aspects of God, proponents of the open view of God achieve a perspective that is both logically consistent and faithful to the full dimensions of the biblical portrait.[5]

Understanding biblical language, therefore, is not a purely linguistic and semantic issue; it is certainly a metaphysical one as well. To accommodate this approach, Rice and others see a dual ontological aspect in which the entire model of God remains "ontologically distinct from created forms" while simultaneously revealing a God who is not only "ontologically other", but is also *immanently* related and responsive to the world.[6] This

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[1] Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 34-35.
[2] Ibid., 35, 49.
[3] Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 54, 60, 67, 71-72, 120.
[4] Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 49.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 111-112.

implies that the "world and God are not radically separated realities", but also that "God is present within every created being".[7] For Pinnock, the gospel portrays new ways of understanding common metaphorical texts and "requires a metaphysical revolution".[8] He elucidates in this way: "Let us not treat the attributes of God independently of the Bible but view the biblical metaphors as reality-depicting descriptions of the living God, whose very being is self-giving love".[9] In order for open theology to free itself from the shadow of traditional hermeneutics and present a biblically based concept of God, Pinnock admits he must "take biblical metaphors more seriously and thereby recover the dynamic and relational God of the gospel, but in doing so it runs the risk of being too literal in its interpretation".[10] Pinnock attempts to avoid the charge of being "too literal" with the text by providing a working solution when he claims:

> One avoids literalism by denying a one-to-one correspondence between metaphors, God's being and agnosticism by affirming a real correspondence between them….This does not mean we take everything literally and do not weigh the issues.[11]

We might take from this that we are not to apply the text in question to God in an "exact" (i.e., one-to-one) fashion, but at the same time, we can readily acknowledge that there is "correspondence" between what is written and the nature of God. Precisely what this "correspondence" is we are not told. However, Pinnock as well as John Sanders contend that all biblical language is metaphorical and anthropomorphic.[12] Pinnock claims to avoid an overly literalistic way of interpreting metaphorical and anthropomorphic language. However, his conclusions that advocate God's suffering, change, repentance, mistaken prophecies and limited foreknowledge tell a dramatically different story. Perhaps this is due to his prior philosophical commitments to a relational model of the nature of God and what it means to have real intimacy with his creatures. Sanders appears to characterize these open commitments when he says:

> The Bible portrays God as a personal agent in a literal sense….If God decides to disclose himself to us as a personal being who enters into relationship with us, who has purposes, emotions and desires, and who suffers with us, then we ought to rejoice in this anthropomorphic portrait and accept it as disclosing to us the *very nature of God*.[13]

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[7] Ibid., 111.

[8] Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 27.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 60-61.

[11] Ibid., 62, 64.

[12] Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 63.

[13] Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 38. Emphasis added.

The prior "commitments", as Sanders describes them are two-fold: First, there is a relational filter to which all statements of God's "nature" must measure up. That is, any conclusion resulting from anthropomorphic language that is contrary to God's temporal, relational and limited nature must be rejected. In practice, then, God is portrayed by such language as he *really* and metaphysically *is*. Boyd makes this clear when he states the open approach to God "is the only view that allows us to affirm that the way things *appear* is basically the way things actually are".[14] Reminiscent of the Kantian division of noumena and phenomena, which favors *appearance* as the primary domain of objective knowledge, Boyd holds a view of hermeneutics that is consistent with open relational ontology. Biblical expressions that are observable and quantifiable are apparently the proper expressions that tell us something positive about God. Second, they are committed to locating some sense in which the passage reflects a *literal* condition that is familiar to human experience, which can be predicated of God's nature. According to Boyd, the open approach to God is appealing for the simple reason that it explains God in a way that is consistent with "how we as humans experience the world and the way we experience ourselves as decision-making beings".[15] What follows is the assumption that unless the anthropomorphic language or metaphor offers us something positive about how God really is, which must be both observable in the world and understandable to the human mind, then biblical language cannot tell us anything about God. Therefore, we gain an understanding of what open hermeneutics favors as their foundational interpretive principles when Boyd responds to a question as to why some assume change is anthropomorphic. He says that any passage can be discovered to be anthropomorphic if the text can be taken literally and it appears to be "ridiculous", or if the passage is "poetic".[16] Boyd says open theism passes this test since:

> There is nothing ridiculous or poetic about the way the Bible repeatedly speaks about God changing his mind, regretting decisions, or thinking and speaking about the future in terms of possibilities. These passages usually occur within the historical narrative sections of Scripture. They only strike some as ridiculous because these readers bring to the text a preconception of what God must be like. Once one is free from this preconception, these passages contribute to the exalted portrait of the loving sovereign God in the Bible.[17]

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[14] Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 90.
[15] Ibid., 91.
[16] Ibid., 118.
[17] Ibid., 118-119.

Boyd adds that "the openness of God and of the future" derived from these types of passages are "not at all on par with a figure of speech in which God has an outstretched arm or protecting wings".[18] One might ask Boyd what he means by "ridiculous". He could be saying that anything that contradicts logic or scripture should be considered anthropomorphic, or he may be claiming anything that doesn't measure up to the openness view of God's relational nature. Perhaps both ideas are in mind. However, if he is suggesting *logical* contradiction as the criteria, how then, we might ask, is an "outstretched arm" any more contradictory than a changing God? Both physicality and change are not opposed to each other logically, but are instead complimentary characteristics. If Boyd means the passage in question is opposed to a relational concept of God, how is this *not* bringing to the text an open theistic *a priori* "preconception" of God's nature? The issue is not whether the interpreter brings preconceptions or philosophical presuppositions to the text—we all do, and it is impossible to avoid. Therefore, the real issue is whether one's preconceptions are correct. Boyd, as well as open theists as a whole, have contended that church tradition, which favors a decidedly Greek notion of God, "has colored the way we read the Bible".[19] If nearly two thousand years of church tradition have been incorrectly interpreting the text through pagan philosophical lenses, how, then, is the open view different? When discussing what it means for God to be "infinite" and "wholly other", and how these concepts relate to what we can know of God and his relation to man, Sanders offers a clear view, which in my estimation, is "the" faulty metaphysical presupposition supporting the entire open theistic model, including their approach to scripture. Without this vital component open theology cannot survive. He states:

> Does language have the capacity to limit the object, or is it merely our understanding that is limited? I see no reason to believe my thoughts about God actually limit God any more than my conceptions of an ant limit the ant. It is true that *my* concepts about God will be limited, but so what? This is only a claim about our creatureliness, not the Creator. Moreover, the assertion that God is unlike anything in the world may be understood in at least two different senses: (1) God is not completely like anything in the world or (2) God is completely unlike everything in the world. It is one thing to assert that God does not share all properties with anything else, but it is quite another matter to say that God does not share any properties with anything else. Clearly, I (along with the bulk of those in the Christian tradition) am rejecting this latter notion. Christian have generally held that although God is more than we can ever comprehend (exhaustively know), God is not totally beyond our knowing or our ability to be in relationship. Further, if 'infinite' means without any predicates from

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[18] Ibid., 119.
[19] Ibid.

within the confines of the conditions of our existence (all human language and conceptualizing), then we are committed to agnosticism about *anything transcendent*—not just God!...If the qualitative difference between God and humanity is absolutely *infinite*, then there is no correspondence between God and the creation, and this will preclude any notions of creation or revelation. Thus it would seem that those who affirm that God shares no properties with anything in the created order are committed to silence concerning anything transcendental (despite their continued talk of it!).[20]

Sanders makes it clear that agnosticism results if there are no "properties" shared by God with his creation. This is the crucial metaphysical aspect on which open theology relies for *all* its unorthodox tenets. There are several features implicit in Sanders' statements that help us obtain specifics regarding open thought, their view of the world and the approach to scripture. First, Sanders and open theism assume that if the qualitative difference between God and humanity is absolutely infinite, there is no correspondence between God and creation, thus eliminating knowledge of creation and revelation. Second, they assume that unless qualitative properties are shared between Creator and creature, there is no basis for human and divine communication and relationships. Though both presuppositions are closely related, they are addressing two distinct and crucial questions. First, in what ontological way are both God and man similar and/or different? Second, how is biblical language predicated of God in a manner fitting the Creator? It is to these questions we turn our attention.

Analogy and Religious Language. The dilemma for modern interpreters, as it has been for the ancients, is making sense of an eternal, infinite and wholly other God while at the same time, being bound to distinctively creaturely modes of expression, which are incapable of fully grasping the essence of God. How can our finite vocabulary, illustrations and intellect bridge an infinite divide? To answer this question, some have attempted to form theories of language that can get us closer to understanding what God is like. Others in the nineteenth and twentieth-century positivist movements have abandoned transcendent forms of language altogether, opting instead for Wittgenstein's linguistic bubble or A.J. Ayer's verifiability principle, which all but eliminated the ontological partnership between language and traditional substance metaphysics.[21] Unlike Ayer, however, others, like Sanders, have challenged the idea that there even exists an infinite

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[20] Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 29.
[21] See A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

ontological-linguistic divide to be crossed. Nevertheless, all parties are in agreement that from the earliest written records of the church fathers through the medieval period, there exists a unified chorus of statements acknowledging the insufficiency of human language to capture the essence of God in its proper sense. Terms such as "ineffable", "incomprehensible", "incomparable", "beyond our knowledge" and "totally other" (*totaliter aliter*) were frequently used to explain the ontological chasm that exists between Creator and creation. As previously discussed, this was due in large to the fathers' attempts to remain faithful to the biblical revelation and at the same time, offer a defense of and distinction between the Christian God, particularly that of the new theanthropic Christ, and the anthropomorphic pagan deities. The patristic fathers and the medievals drew a sharp ontological line of demarcation between Creator and created in order to emphasize the transcendence of God. For example, Aristides says the elements are "perishable and mutable, produced out of that which did not exist at the command of the true God, who is indestructible and immutable and invisible".[22] Theophilus emphasizes the transcendence, wholly otherness and limits on human knowledge of God when he asserts, "For in glory He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom, unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable…".[23] Irenaeus portrays God as wholly other when he describes the Gnostic heretical notion of ascribing to God characteristics of men when he writes:

> By their [Gnostics] manner of speaking, they ascribe those things which apply to men to the Father of all, whom they also declare to be unknown to all…while at the same time they endow Him with human affections and passions….His thought are not like the thoughts of men…For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions that operate among men….And so, in all other particulars, the Father of us all is in no degree similar to human weakness.[24]

Clement of Alexandria describes God's nature as unnamable:

> For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered with reference to inscrutability, but with reference to its being without dimensions, and not having a limit. And therefore it is without form and name. And if we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the one, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator, or Lord.[25]

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[22] Aristides, *Apology* (Greek Version), IV, in Allan Menzies, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 9, 266.

[23] Theophilus, *Autolycus*, I.3, in Roberts and Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 89-90.

[24] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.13.3-4, in Ibid., volume 1, 374.

[25] Clement, *Stromata*, V.12, in Ibid., volume 2, 464.

When speaking of the impassibility of God, Novatian asserts the transcendent and *totaliter aliter* nature of God:

> Moreover, if we read of His wrath, and consider certain descriptions of His indignation, and learn that hatred is asserted of Him, yet we are not to understand these to be asserted of Him in the sense in which they are human vices. For all these things, although they may corrupt man, cannot at all corrupt the divine power. For such passions as these will rightly be said to be in men, and will not rightly be judged to be in God. For man may be corrupted by these things, because he can be corrupted; God may not be corrupted by them, because He cannot be corrupted. For that God is angry, arises from no vice in Him. But He is so for our advantage; for He is merciful even then when He threatens, because by these threats men are recalled to rectitude….For the diversity in us of the materials of which we consist, is accustomed to arouse the discord of anger which corrupts us; but this, whether of nature or of defect, cannot subsist in God, seeing that He is known to be constructed assuredly of no associations of bodily parts. For He is simple and without any corporeal commixture, being wholly of that essence, which,…constitutes His being, since He is called spirit. And thus those things which in men are faulty and corrupting, since they arise from the corruptibility of the body, and matter itself, in God cannot exert the force of corruptibility, since, as we have said they have come, not of vice, but of reason.[26]

Augustine describes the patience, jealousy and wrath of God as "ineffable", and far from those qualities as they relate to creaturely natures.[27] Anselm limits God-talk to only what suits God's nature when he avers that "nothing may be predicated of the supreme and immutable nature which might suggest that it is mutable".[28] Aquinas makes clear that no other nature or essence is like God when he said, "But things are said to be distant from God by the unlikeness to Him in nature or grace; as also He is above all by the excellence of His own nature".[29] Again he states, "It is impossible for any created intellect to see the essence of God by its own natural power".[30] For Aquinas, one cannot possibly know the infinite essence with finite modes of knowing and expression to which all persons are bound.[31]

In every instance, whether implicitly or explicitly stated, the Church as a whole has coupled their acknowledgment of limited creaturely expressions of God with him as transcendent Creator and as first and primary cause of all there is. Therefore, the Church viewed God as ontologically other. From this fact arises the necessity of discovering in what ways God's nature differs and is related to human nature and created things in general since it is from this limited creaturely pool of knowledge and being that all God-

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[26] Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, V, in Ibid., volume 5, 615.
[27] Augustine, *On Patience*, I.1, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3, 527.
[28] Anselm, *Monologion* 25, in Davies and Evans, ed., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, 42.
[29] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.8.1 ad 3.
[30] Ibid., I.12.4.
[31] Aquinas, *On Truth*, translated by J.V. McGlynn (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1952-54), 2.1.

talk emerges and is understood. To discover the ontological relationship between God and man, which forms the basis of our expressions and understanding of him, requires both open and classical theologians to ask the crucial question of the nature of the particular causality that provides the metaphysical grounding for Creator-creature similarity. For if there is no similarity at all, the open theists have contended that the creature is locked out of any meaningful knowledge gained from statements of God. If there is an identity or one-to-one correspondence we risk idolatry, pantheism or both. Traditionally, biblical revelation and the church have seen the relationship as being comprised of similarity and difference.[32] However, what is the basis of the similarity between Creator and creature? That is to ask, does the creature participate in the divine-creature ontological relationship, and if so, to what extent? For answers to these questions, we must initially turn to the influential articulation of the doctrine of analogy (of being, participation and predication) put forth by Aquinas.[33] For Thomas, causality is foundational in indentifying the kind of ontological relation that exists between God and creatures. This is necessary due to the limitations of our language and from recognizing that all God-talk proceeds from our finite conceptions and limited experience, which falls well-short of the infinite deity to which it is applied. Therefore, the implication is clear: If there is no resemblance, image or likeness between God and the world, there cannot be any basis for meaningful discussion or knowledge of God. Thomas explains:

> We can name God only from creatures (A. 1). Thus whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exists excellently.[34]

Though our vocabulary is governed by this relationship, there may be knowledge of God, but only according to the quality of participation involved. When addressing whether a name could be given to God he answers:

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[32] Both classical and open proponents agree that there is some sense in which a similarity and difference exists between God and man. However, they do not agree on the ontological nature of the similarity.

[33] See Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 86ff. Though analogy did not start with Aquinas (see Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, patristic fathers, Plotinus, Henry of Ghent and others), he has offered the most developed form of analogy of those who came before him in a classical context.

[34] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.5.

> In this life we cannot see the essence of God; but we know God from creatures as their principle and also by way of excellence and remotion. In this way therefore He can be named by us from creatures, yet not so that the name expresses the divine essence in itself.[35]

It is evident that Aquinas believes there is a causal relationship between Creator and creature, which affords some basis of predication about God. He identifies several things pertaining to God-talk. Of primary concern is placing God as the primary cause of the creature's very *being*, whose perfections have priority in God's nature in an ontologically essential way that differs from the secondary mode in which these perfections reside in creatures. Since essential primary causes (e.g., God) communicate their likeness to the effect (e.g., man),[36] there is some sense in which God and man are similar. For Aquinas, however:

> Effects that fall short of their causes do not agree with them in nature. Yet, some likeness must be found between them, since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produce its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act. The form of an effect, therefore, is certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and another way. For this reason the cause is called an *equivocal cause*....God gave things all their perfections and thereby is both like and unlike all of them.[37]

He rejects any equal ontological standing between the primary essential cause and the effect, though he grants a "measure" of similarity between the two. This is crucial since for Thomas, there are only three options pertaining to causality. The cause could have communicated to the effect the exact same attributes and ontological mode. However, this is impossible since as Parmenides correctly proclaimed that to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. That is, cause and effect that are identical in being are actually the same being. Since there is no principle or mode of differentiation on the metaphysical level of being itself, they are both one and not multiple. Moreover, univocal causality cannot remove itself from monism since if cause and effect are one in their being without difference, there is ultimately only one being in the universe. It is impossible to create being totally like its cause in every way.[38] On the other hand, Aquinas is aware of causing an effect that is

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[35] Ibid., I.13.1.

[36] For a cause cannot communicate to another what it does not have to communicate. In this case, we are speaking of being itself. Therefore, the cause of being must itself be being.

[37] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.29.2.

[38] It is true also on logical grounds that cause and effect cannot be identical since a "caused" so defined is "that which produces and effect". An "effect" so defined is "that which is caused". Therefore, a cause and effect to be identical is absurd.

totally different (equivocal) since it leads to the same monistic result. For what is totally opposite of being is non-being. Here too, only one being could exist, leaving unanswered the notion of why there appears to be many beings. Therefore, Aquinas embraces the third and final option, and since there are many beings (and not only one), being then must be both different and similar. Instead of describing an *extrinsic* causal relation[39] between God and his effect, which would not necessarily communicate to the effect any particular like perfection of the cause, he opts for an *intrinsic* causal relation to creatures, which communicates some form/perfection to the effect. However, if the Being of God has nothing identical to the man's being, how then is there any similarity at all? Thomas explains that though the *being* of both analogates differ in kind, there is a real sense in which the image and likeness of God is present in man's being. He is acutely aware that the perfections in the effect must differ in some respect from its cause to avoid monism, pantheism, blasphemy or idolatry, and therefore, Thomas explains that though these perfections are real, they nevertheless exist according to man's mode of being. Thomas explains in this way:

> As said in the preceding article, all perfections existing in creatures divided and multiplied, pre-exist in God unitedly. Thus, when any term expressing perfection is applied to a creature, it signifies that perfection distinct in idea from other perfections; as, for instance, by this term *wise* applied to a man, we signify some perfection distinct from a man's essence, and distinct from his power and existence, and from all similar things; whereas when we apply it to God, we do not mean to signify anything distinct from His essence, or power, or existence. Thus also this term *wise* applied to man in some degree circumscribes and comprehends the thing signified; whereas this is not the case when applied to God; but it leaves the thing signified as incomprehended, and as exceeding the signification of the name. Hence it is evident that this term wise is not applied in the same way to God and to man. The same rule applies to other terms. Hence no name is predicated univocally of God and of creatures.[40]

That is to say, perfections exist in man as compounded, temporal, finite and changing way, whereas in God's being, they exist in a simple, eternal, unchanging, infinite and purely actual way. The former consists of actuality and potentiality, which excludes the perfections from being necessary. On the other hand, the latter perfections exist in God in a purely actual way without passive potency, making those perfections properly so-called— Necessary. For instance, by virtue of what God *is* (his *esse* is his *essence*) as the primary

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[39] This kind of causal relation occurs when only one of the analogates (i.e., cause and effect) possesses a characteristic such as when the heat rays of the sun harden clay. "Hardness" is not a property of heat, but it is of clay, though it remains the cause of the hardness.

[40] Ibid., I.13.5.

first intrinsic cause of all being, God *is* being, and man *has* being; God *is* knowledge, man *has* knowledge; God *is* wisdom, man *has* wisdom in an analogous way. God does not possess his perfections; he *is* those very perfections essentially.[41] Unlike God, man possesses these qualities by way of analogy, thus man participates in the perfections of God.[42] For example, a painting reflects the qualities of the painter, not that he *is* a colorful canvas, but that he is orderly, intelligent, skillful and creative. However, these qualities were first in the painter and subsequently reflected in the painting by way of similarity. Battista Mondin's excellent work on Aquinas' view of analogy summarizes this crucial concept as "one to another" analogy of being when he elucidates:

> According to this mode of analogy the same absolute perfection is predicated of both God and His creatures, but it is predicated according to priority and posteriority: the same perfection belongs to both of them but not in the same way. Analogy of one to another is fit for theological discourse since, on the one hand, it safeguards God's absoluteness and uniqueness and, on the other hand, does not destroy the ontological consistence of finite beings.[43]

Mondin's summary of Aquinas' view of the intrinsic analogy of attribution is both simple and profound for several reasons. First, the participation in God's Being is said to consist of *real* perfections, not imaginary or metaphorical, which are based on a causal relation. Therefore, the *similarity* between cause and effect is discovered in those very perfections, whereas the *dissimilarity*, according to Mondin, is manifested in the "mode of being". Second, the perfections in creatures are said to be by "posteriority", which implies a unidirectional causal relation, which points to a secondary status for the effect. In other words, the perfections in the creature are from the top down which demands that God be the objective measure of the given perfection as his are "prior" to the effect. For instance, both man and God are *wise*. However, the direction of wisdom comes from the *per se*

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[41] Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004 [first published by The Newman Press, 1932]), III.7.7.

[42] Analogy of being used here is emphasizing the difference and similarity between God and man. The similarity is "being" (that which is) and the difference is the mode or kind of being. Here, it means God *is* Being, and man *has* being. Therefore, the similarity exists in the perfections themselves, while the difference exists in the *mode* of being.

Te Velde offers a helpful description of analogy as seen in Aquinas when he comments, "…analogy is essentially a matter of using words beyond their proper domain (*genus*) to signify something belonging to another domain which is in a certain manner related to the former. Two things belonging to different domains are named by a common name". (*Aquinas on God*, 115).

[43] Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), 34-35.

cause to the posterior effect. This implies that God is the standard of wisdom and man is the one finitely subject to it, albeit remaining wise in himself according to his secondary mode of being. Therefore, it is true that man is wise and God is wise, however, God is primarily, intrinsically, infinitely, eternally, necessarily and with priority wise. Man is secondarily, intrinsically, finitely, temporally, contingently and with posteriority wise. Some have confused this view with the analogy according to "proper proportion." This viewpoint suggests that we speak in terms of the ratios or proportions things (i.e., analogates) have in relation to each other. For example, proportions can be stated this way: Infinite wisdom is to infinite Being what finite wisdom is to finite being. To illustrate this principle mathematically, it would say 5 is to 10 as 15 is to 30, highlighting the proportionate quality in both equations as half.[44] In the same way, theologically speaking, we could say eternal wisdom is to eternal Being as temporal wisdom is to temporal being. Herman Reith succinctly explains analogy this way:

> The word *analogy* comes from two Greek words: ana/ which is a preposition meaning *back toward*, like the Latin word *retro;* and lo/goj, which in the present context means *thought* or *idea*. Analogous terms are used in a discourse that entails a comparison, a reciprocal movement of thought. In analogy the human mind compares different things on the basis of some relationship that they have to each other, and thus it comes to understand them by seeing them in focus. Different things receive a common name because each bears a relationship to something that a common name principally signifies. By the use of a common name the mind attempts to reduce the diversity of objects to the unity of thought.[45]

Though we may retain Reith's helpful explanation of analogy in general, the analogy of proper proportion may not be the wisest route in demonstrating the similarity and differences between God and humans. For how can an infinite God be compared to finite man by proportion or ratio when there is no comparison possible between them? This form of analogy may be better suited for comparisons on a mathematical level or between two things of the same *genus* or species. There is another kind of analogy known as "analogy of attribution", which Aquinas appears to favor for good reason. It is this relationship that forms the basis of similarity and dissimilarity between cause and effect. For example, when speaking of a "healthy" apple, it is not technically the apple that is healthy since healthy is usually a property in living organisms. However, it is considered healthy

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[44] Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 86.
[45] Herman Reith, *The Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1958), 41.

because it causes or is a sign of health in a person. Thus, an apple is healthy because of the relation it has to a person. The same is true of human beings when we call them wise or good; it is not because people are wise and good inherently, but because of the intrinsic causal relationship one has to God as wise and good. Thomas, however, would caution us not to think God simply "causes" goodness and wisdom in humans—it is more than that since God also "causes" material bodies, yet God is not a body. These perfections exist in humans, though dimly, faintly and as a sign of God's goodness because of our relation to God. Thomas explains:

> These names are applied to God not as the cause only, but also essentially. For the words, God is good, or wise, signify not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these exist in Him in a more excellent way. Hence as regards what the name signifies, these names are applied primarily to God rather than to creatures, because these perfections flow from God to creatures; but as regards the imposition of the names, they are primarily applied by us to creatures which we know first. Hence they have a mode of signification which belongs to creatures, as said above.[46]

Simon Oliver adds:

> We say that God is good *in himself*. I am good not in myself, but by virtue of my relation to God, for God enables me to be good and, in being a creature of God, I am a sign of God's goodness. Aquinas would say that the principal focus of the term 'good' is God, and all other things are analogously referred to as 'good' by virtue of their relation to this principle focus.[47]

Wisdom and goodness are attributed to humans and are intrinsic to their nature, though they are not considered the essence of what the creature *is*. That is to say, God *is* wise and good, man *has* wisdom and goodness. To put it another way, we are a *sign* of God's wisdom and goodness. Here, it is important to remember that the attribute and the mode of its being is according to their own respective natures, thus preserving the similarity and difference between cause and effect.[48] The similarity of the perfection would ultimately stress God's immanence, and the dissimilarity would stress his transcendence. The former

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[46] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.6.

[47] Unpublished manuscript by Simon Oliver, "Part I: What Is Radical Orthodoxy?" obtained through personal correspondence dated April 17, 2009.

[48] When discussing predication, Owens makes clear that though the term *analogia* comes to us from Greek mathematical usage [see Mondin's informative discussion of the historical usage of the term in *The Doctrine of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 1-6] and that it is not emphasizing "equality", but rather is demonstrating similarity. He describes analogical relationships of this kind as "a likeness in the respective ways in which the terms are related to each other in the two pairs. But the likeness is found in a feature that differentiates the instances. Conversely, the various instances while different in themselves exhibit in that very difference itself enough similarity to require expression in one and the same notion" (Ibid., 86-87).

offers the creature real knowledge of God, albeit according to finite modes of knowing, whereas the latter would be described as incomprehensible since there is an infinite ontological and epistemological gap between the infinite God and the finite creature. This gap has been perfectly bridged by the theanthropic incarnation of Christ whose divine and human perfections were in perfect relation to the Father and, therefore, have become the ultimate example in the analogy of being (*analogia entis*), which could say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 1:18; 14:9).

Open theism could argue against this form of analogy by asserting that God caused physical matter and finitude, though matter and finitude are not properties in God. This is true. However, God cannot cause another being identical to himself. Therefore, it is impossible to cause another uncaused being with identical attributes. God had only one option when creating, which is namely to create something *other* than himself, limiting his creation to forms of temporality and finitude. Furthermore, not all effects, such as physicality, finitude and matter flow from God's *intrinsic* causality. These kinds of things have an *extrinsic* causal relation to God. Things have an "extrinsic" relation when they are discovered to be inherently finite by their very natures; that is, they exist in a mode which is not present in the cause. Therefore, the inherent limitation in finitude and matter prevents those qualities from being predicable of God.[49] Though, on the other hand, there is nothing inherently limiting in the simple perfections such as knowledge, wisdom and being other than their respective modes of existence. Certainly, open proponents could argue, and rightly so, that all things created, including matter and physical form, must in some sense reflect their cause. Mondin identifies the crucial difference between extrinsic and intrinsic participation and its implications for our knowledge of God when he explains:

> Analogy of extrinsic attribution either destroys the consistence of creation or leads to agnosticism with respect to God and destroys His immanence in creation….All these inadequacies are avoided in analogy of one to another according to priority and posteriority, since it is able to indicate at the same time the possession and the order of possession of absolute perfections by creatures and God.[50]

Indeed, it appears there must be some analogy with physicality and matter since physical humans were caused to exist by God as "male and female" and "in His image" (Gen. 1:26-27). The Psalmist said of material creation, "The heavens declare the glory of

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[49] Ibid., 84.

[50] Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 50.

God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge" (Ps. 19:1-2). Paul asserts that "what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them….His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead…" (Rom. 1:19-20). The similarity can be discovered in that both physicality and matter have *being*, whereas God is *Being*. The difference rests in the uniqueness of their respective modes of being. Being is the one common denominator of all things that are. The unity is in the similarity of being, as Aquinas said Pure Act produces beings that consist of actuality and potentiality. God is Pure Actuality and all created effects exist as complex units of actuality and potentiality. The *similarity* between cause (i.e., God) and effect (i.e., creation) is discovered in the "act" both entities posses; the *difference* resides in the creature's potentiality or mode of being. As Joseph Owens has correctly observed, "Since being is the act of all acts and the perfections of all perfections, where it subsists it will be perfection in the highest degree. There is no higher act that could make it more perfect".[51] From the analogy of being, then, comes the traditional view of religious language and its application to the divine.

As previously discussed, Aquinas employs the analogy of being to inform our predications of God when he says "whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principal and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently".[52] At issue here is discovering the appropriate methods of applying finite language and concepts that are based in the analogical intrinsic relationship between Creator and the creature and that are fitting to apply to God and man. Te Velde sums up the assignment as follows:

> The question on the divine names focuses on the issue of how God can be named, given the fact that, first, God is absolutely simple and perfect and second, that we know God from creatures. The central question is not so much which names in particular can be assigned to God, but rather *how* God can be named by us.[53]

There are primarily two questions essential to our discovery: First, how are concepts used in God-talk to be *defined*? Second, how do we *apply* these concepts to the infinite God? Since our knowledge and vocabulary is entirely defined in terms of creaturely effects

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[51] Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 83.
[52] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.5.
[53] Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 116.

known through the finite limitation of our environment, one must work from this starting point. Of the alternatives Aquinas analyzes, three options are available for how we understand religious language definitions and predications—univocal, equivocal and analogical.[54] Aquinas is unimpressed with equivocal (i.e., totally different) concepts and predication since without the same definition of terms when applied to God and man, one cannot know the meaning of what is said. Thus, Aquinas emphatically disagrees with Moses Maimonides' (1135-1204) equivocal predication doctrine. In the *Summa Theologica* and *On the Power of God* Aquinas says:

> Since all our knowledge of God is taken from creatures, if the agreement were purely nominal, we should know nothing about God except empty expressions to which nothing corresponds in reality.[55]

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* he explains:

> Where there is pure equivocation, there is no likeness in things themselves; there is only the unity of the name. But, as is clear from what we have said, there is a certain mode of likeness of things to God. It remains, then, that names are not said of God in a purely equivocal way.[56]

Essentially, equivocal language, both in concept and predication, leaves one without knowledge of God and sees absolutely no similarity between the cause (God) and the effect (creature). It essentially collapses into agnosticism. Aquinas is equally disturbed with the univocal approach to predication which advocates applying terms to God as they exist in creatures without any sort of modification.[57] Because creatures are not identical (i.e., univocal) with the divine mode in which those perfections exist, Aquinas rejects univocal *predication*. That is to say, univocal terms must be applied to God according to the unique way in which the perfection exists in him. For example, creatures exist according to their own way as a finite effect, and God exists according to his own way as the infinite Creator and cause. Thomas reasons that finite terms possess a mode of signification that is inherently creaturely and limited, which does not adequately express the divine nature. Aquinas explains:

> Now God's relation to being is different than any creature's: for he is his own being, which cannot be said of any creature. Hence in no way can it be predicated univocally of God and a creature, and consequently can either of the other predicables among which is included even the first, *being:* for if

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[54] Ibid.; *Summa Theologica*, I.13.5; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.32ff.

[55] Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.7.7.

[56] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.33.3.

[57] Ibid., I.32.2.

there be diversity in the first, there must be diversity in the others: wherefore nothing is predicated univocally of substance and accident.[58]

For Aquinas, the straightforward way is to see univocal predication as an unacceptable means of describing God since God is simply not a univocal *cause*. We cannot apply terms to God univocally because he is not ontologically a part of the same creaturely species; he differs from the creature's mode of being.[59] If both the cause and effect were equally human, then univocal predication of terms could occur since they are members of the same species (i.e., man), which share a common nature.[60] Thomas clearly recognized that these perfections exist in the creature in a different way, and to violate this principle would be to describe God with the limitations of humans and to fail to distinguish between the creature's and Creator's mode of being. This is not to say that Aquinas rejects univocal *concepts* as far as they carry the same *definition* when spoken of God and man.[61] This way of thinking suggests that any perfection applied to God must contain the same *meaning* when it is applied to creatures. For instance, when "being" is defined as "that which exists", or the term "good", which means "that which is desirable in itself for its own sake and not a means to an end", it is used of both God and creatures. Without the aid of univocal concepts (i.e., same definition), as John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) argued, we would be without humanly understandable meaning and subsequently would reduce to agnosticism.[62] For Scotus, purely negative language was not acceptable when speaking of

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[58] Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.7.7.

[59] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.4.3.

[60] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.5.

[61] Some have understood Scotus and Aquinas to have mutually exclusive positions when it comes to their views of religious language. However, it would be better to interpret them as complimentary in one sense since both Aquinas and Scotus held to univocal definitions (Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.34.4-5 cf. John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, translated by Allan Wolter (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962 [first published in 1962 by Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd]), 22-23.

[62] I am not suggesting here that Aquinas' analogy of language is based merely on semantic considerations, which would essentially divorce his approach of God-talk from his ontology. Here, we are speaking of communication on a human level reflecting how creatures may understand other creatures' language of God, though admittedly these descriptions will always fall short of what God is like essentially. Aquinas has demonstrated in the *Summa Theologica* I.13.1 (as Rudi Te Velde has also argued correctly in his *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae*) that "voice" refers to the matter (*res*) of an expression, whereas the "concept" mediates our use of expressions based on the specific aspect (*ratio*) of our rational account of their meaning (i.e., *Voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus*). As Te Velde has shown, this implies that the meaning of words (voices) is never exhausted by our subsequent attempts to clarify their meaning based on rational definitions. This explains why perfection terms refer to God even when finite attempts to define their meaning may be inappropriate. The fact that

God since each negation implies a prior affirmation and ultimately cannot communicate anything of positive substance since its focus is on what the object *lacks* or "is not". He explains:

> For every denial is intelligible in terms of some affirmation. It is also clear that we can know negations of God only by means of affirmations; for if we deny anything of God, it is because we wish to do away with something inconsistent with what we have already affirmed….If the negation is understood as modifying something, then I inquire after the underlying notion of which the negation is understood to be true. It will be either an affirmative or a negative notion. If it is affirmative, we have what we seek. If it is negative, I inquire as I did before.[63]

Though Aquinas argued against univocal "predication", he adopted univocal concepts. It appears that Aquinas emphasized the *modus significandi* (application) and Scotus stressed the conceptual *meaning*. In the end, the only ontologically and linguistically suitable religious language is by analogy. While Thomas holds to univocal concepts with identical definitions by rejecting outright equivocal language, he believes the middle between two extremes is analogical predication, which will preserve both the Creator and creature causal relation, similarity, dissimilarity and convey knowledge of God without offense.[64] Terms applied to God, which are *properly* and *primarily* found in the divine nature and *improperly* and *secondarily* found in the human nature such as life, wisdom, goodness, love and knowledge may be predicated of God by creatures without any inherent limitations in the predicate.[65] However, these same terms couched in finite modes of significance will be found primarily in creatures and secondarily and metaphorically in God.[66] It is necessary to remove from each term the finite mode denoted prior to application to God. Te Velde addresses the importance of the *modus significandi* when analogical application is in practice in the following manner:

> Under the aspect of what they signify these names are attributable to God *proprie*, although the *modus* in which the perfections are signified and conceived by us correspond to the contracted *modus* they have in creatures. The perfections, as they are in God (God's wisdom, God's life), escape the determinate and distinct meaning these perfections have for us. It is therefore impossible to grasp, even approximately, the reality of the divine mode of perfection by means of those names and their corresponding conceptual contents. But the fact that the perfection names admit of divine predication reveals their transcategorical nature. The perfections they signify are in themselves not

Thomas links the expressions of God-talk with his ontology provides immunity against a univocal Scotist reading of the issue.

[63] John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, translated by Allan Wolter (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962 [first published in 1962 by Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd]).

[64] Thomas says, "It must be said that these names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense, that is, according to proportion" (*Summa Theologica*, I.13.5).

[65] Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 116.

[66] Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Catholic and Protestant Theology*, 96.

intrinsically finite, by reason of which they can be affirmed properly of the infinite reality of God under the negation of the finite mode they have in creatures.[67]

From the analogy of being and language comes the implication for anthropomorphic language such as arms, eyes, wings, rocks and so forth. Since these terms do not belong properly to God and only to creatures, any finitude inherent in the word must be stripped of all ontological limiting concepts such as materiality, corporeality, finitude and any other creaturely aspect. Whatever remains can be applied to God. For example, God's arm could refer to his strength, his eyes to his knowledge and wisdom, his wings to his protection and care, or the idea of God as a rock could refer to his strength and security for his people. All metaphors, which include language about God from a finite perspective must be reduced to a status where the terms signify what is inherently unlimited. That is to say, all terms that have an extrinsic causal relation to God, including all metaphors, anthropomorphisms (i.e., human physical form), anthropopathisms (i.e., human emotions) and anthropoieses (i.e., human actions), must be reduced to a metaphysical statement unlimited by what the term signifies.[68] Another way to understand this is to remove any finitude and *potentiality* from the perfection and then attribute it to God as pure actuality, since this reflects his nature.[69] For example, a reference to God changing his mind should be stripped of the inherent potentiality from the statement, which in this case is the "change" since there is nothing essentially limiting or in potential about "mind". Thus, God has an unchanging mind. Moreover, this will ensure that the Creator-creature ontological distinction is maintained while at the same time, will convey to the creature knowledge similar to the way God actually is. The rejection of analogy by open proponents is characterized by confusion, misunderstanding, incoherence and an unorthodox approach to being and language. As I see it, there are two fundamental problems with the open model of religious language.

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume I* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 28.

[69] Technically speaking, all God-talk must use the *via negativa* since one needs to remove all finitude implied by the perfection including its mode of signification. Even our so-called positive descriptions of God such as "spirit" really means immaterial, and "simple" literally refers to the non-multiple/complex. This does not leave one in agnosticism since there must be, as Plotinus correctly stated, all negative language implies positive knowledge.

First, open theists argue that if an "infinite" ontological gap exists between the infinite God and finite creatures, then analogy of being and language as described above does not adequately provide an epistemological solution for religious knowledge and communication. Sanders claims, "If the qualitative difference between God and humanity is absolutely *infinite*, then there is no correspondence between God and the creation, and this will preclude any notions of creation or revelation. Thus it would seem that those who affirm that God shares no properties with anything in the created order are committed to silence concerning anything transcendental…"[70] Again he claims, "If one suggests that there is an infinite difference between the analogates when speaking of God and humanity, then the doctrine of analogy fails to give us any knowledge of God".[71] Sanders, along with open theism as a whole, appears to confuse what analogy is actually saying, which is namely that the infinite span between God and creatures is adequately dealt with by an intrinsic causal relation between the infinite Cause and the finite effect by which the creature participates in God's perfections by way of similarity. Sanders seems to hold that being is all or nothing—either univocal being or equivocal being. However, being cannot be univocal since this destroys the distinction between Creator and creature and collapses to monism. Besides, it is impossible to create another uncreated perfection/attribute. It cannot be equivocal because then, as Sanders correctly observes, nothing could be known of God. Sanders does not see that the "properties" such as mind, will, knowledge, wisdom and so forth are shared by creatures, though they are according to their own respective finite mode of being. These same properties are found in God properly, whereas they are in creatures improperly. In other words, God *is*, and creatures *are* or *have*. In addition, Sanders, mistakenly assumes the defenders of analogy hold that "similarities between God and us are univocal".[72] However, "similarities" cannot be univocal, or else they would not be "similarities" but rather "univocities". If the creature's perfections were the same as God's perfections, there would be no difference between God and creatures. If Sanders means that we must utilize univocal *definitions* when discussing these Creator-creature similarities, then proponents of analogy would agree since we must know what these terms mean.

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[70] Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 29.

[71] Ibid., footnote 43, 286.

[72] Ibid., 25.

Second, Sanders seems to be unaware of the need to make a distinction between the perfection itself and the *modus significandi*. This is reflected in Sanders' statement when he asserts:

> There must be some properties that are used of God *in the same sense* that they are used of things in the created order. Otherwise we will be back in the cave of agnosticism. Anthropomorphic language does not preclude *literal predication to God*. Of course, the question must be asked, What is it to which the anthropomorphisms refer? If *God shares the same context with us* by entering into relation with us, as the biblical revelation presupposes, then we have a *basis* for our language about God. What I mean by the word *literal* is that our language about God is reality depicting (truthful) such that there is a referent, an other, with whom we are in relationship and of whom we have genuine knowledge.[73]

Here, the relational metaphysics of open theism is inadequate. For if properties that are used of God are "in the *same* sense" used of creation, what is the ontological difference between creation and Creator? The basis must be more than merely a personal "relationship." It must be grounded in a real intrinsic causal nexus between Cause and effect. Since open theism rejects an equivocal and analogical relationship between Creator and creature as leading to agnosticism, they must render intelligible a univocal relationship of being, which they have not attempted beyond relational argumentation. For open theism, the predication of the literal finite mode of signification to God appears to be as equally important as their insistence on literal finite perfections when speaking of God. Univocal being must stand or fall together with univocal predication, and the former must serve as the basis for the latter. In efforts to build his case for the univocal view of being and predication, Sanders summons support from Aquinas' statements in *Summa Theologica* I.13.3 ad 1, which advocate the "literal" and "absolute" and non-metaphorical usage of terms such as "being", "good" and "living" when speaking of God.[74] Unfortunately, Sanders does not appear to be aware or completely disregards the context in which Aquinas makes his statements. Immediately prior, Aquinas distinguished between 1) the perfections which flowed from God to creatures and 2) their mode of signification. According to Thomas, the perfections spoken of belong properly to God and not to creatures, and as he says, "But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures".[75] This is due to the fact that the perfections that creatures posses are in God in a more eminent way than

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[73] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.3.

in creatures.[76] So, though Aquinas does indeed say that these terms can be literally applied to God, he does not mean in a univocal way. He is only suggesting that the meaning of these terms (i.e., being, living and good) have no inherent limitation or material property attached to them to warrant a metaphorical designation. He is *not* suggesting that these terms can be known or applied to God the way he actually and literally is in the divine being, goodness and life. The error of open theism, then, is a classical case of inverting the unidirectional flow of perfections received by creatures from God without modifying the mode of signification. This error has given rise to the critical mistake of interpreting being as univocal, which has led to a hyper-literal way of interpreting and predicating biblical God-talk. This rigid univocal way of over-literalizing being is seen in Rice's critical comment regarding the classical view of immutability and its implication for the world when he claims:

> We saw that when perfection is conceived of as absolute changelessness, God's experience of the world must also be absolutely changeless. And this means that the world itself is essentially changeless too.[77]

Because God's experience does not change, does this prevent the world from changing? This univocal logic simply does not follow. This would imply that whatever God is, the world is and that whatever the world is, God must also be. Here, Rice confuses an unchanging cause with a changing effect and the ontological with the epistemological. He must have been unaware that logic prohibits and unchanging cause to give rise to an unchanging effect since substantial change is necessary in bringing about the effect. Further, there is no reason why an unchanging God cannot know and relate to a changing world according to its own mode of being without conveying or receiving characteristics of another's nature. To know and relate to a bird does not necessitate me taking on the identical nature of the object, nor vice-versa. Boyd expresses this same rigid literalness when describing his hermeneutical approach to biblical passages:

> The open view is rooted in the conviction that the passages that constitute the motif of future openness should be taken just as literally as the passages that constitute the motif of future determinism.[78]

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, 25.

[78] Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 54.

This, however, would put Boyd at odds with his position of divine knowledge, which is said to exhaustively know the present and the past. A literal hermeneutic applied to narrative passages like Genesis 18:20 where God told Abraham that he was going to Sodom to "see *if*" the "outcry against Sodom" was consistent with their deeds. Even here, a literal approach to these words would preclude the notion of God's exhaustive *present* knowledge of the condition of the city and its inhabitants. The failure of open theism to navigate a classical course in substance metaphysics along with the rise of relational priority has placed them in a precarious position of creating God in the image of man by employing an overly-literal hermeneutic.[79] Without the abandonment of their taproot doctrine of univocal being and predication, proponents of open theism will inevitably arrive at their current anthropomorphic conclusions.[80] Ultimately, openness models of God reflect a lack of careful consideration of the priority and mode in which these perfections exist in God and, therefore, have confused ontological priority with epistemological priority. That is to say, the perfections that exist in man are epistemologically prior in the order of *creaturely knowing*. However, these same perfections are ontologically prior in the order of *divine Being*. Unfortunately, open proponents have predicated based on the order and mode of knowing, not on the order of primary causal Being. This error can be seen in Boyd's summary of the entire open debate by his affirmation that God's knowledge is dependent upon the *nature* of the *object* known when he says, "The issue is not about God's knowledge at all. Everyone agrees he knows reality perfectly. The issue is the *content* of the reality God perfectly knows⸺how many things and what kind of things there are on the 'plot of land' we call the future".[81] It appears Boyd is claiming that the nature and mode of the objects of knowledge, in some sense, determine the nature and mode of God's knowledge. That is, God's knowledge must conform to the way in which a thing exists instead of the knower knowing according

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[79] See this fallacious principle at work in Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, 23, and footnote 12 on the same page, 37-40.

[80] Open theology does admit that not all creaturely characteristics apply to God (e.g., he is not a burning bush), however, they are inconsistent on this matter. Their logic, which essentially asserts that "the Creator must take on the *modus operandi* of the creature in order to meaningfully relate", demands that God be even more radically finite that they currently contend. For example, if God must be changing and temporal with externally stimulated feelings in order to have genuine relationships with creatures, he should also be material and have the potential to sin as well. If not, how can he relate to sinners who have material bodies?

[81] Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 125.

to the mode of his own existence and nature.[82] This confusion appears to be consistent with late fourth-century Platonist philosopher, Calcidius (whom open theists cite favorably) who seemed to have argued against Stoic fatalism by asserting that God's manner of knowing must conform to the objects of knowledge as they are[83] and not how God *is*, thus reversing the order of knowing and being. In essence, analogy is completely broken down when the nature and mode of the created order determines the nature and mode of the uncreated order. Thus, now we understand why open theology makes no provision for God's knowledge of future contingents primarily since the future does not exist for the creature, and the Creator is precluded from knowing what has no being or ontological substance. Since the future does not exist, God's knowledge of the future does not exist and, therefore, is not a proper object of knowledge.[84]

As a result, open theism's rejection of intrinsic analogy of being and predication makes it impossible for open theism to metaphysically account for any form of God-talk other than the anthropomorphic expressions they currently use to describe God's literal nature within the same *genus* as man. Now we must ask if open religious language should really be considered to be "God-talk". It would be more appropriately described as "creature-talk". In their zeal to make God more relational and involved in the world ontologically, they have sacrificed any metaphysical means by which to know and communicate about the One who is in some sense, as open theists believe, other. What is more, it leaves unexplained the relationship between the unchanging and changing poles in God. For if there is no analogy between these different poles, how can we really know what God is like? It seems unreasonable that openness advocates would acknowledge an intrinsic analogy between the two poles of God which are very different and even mirror the divine-creature relation. Specifically, how is the unchanging character of God reflected through the changing and responsive divine nature? In addition, how is God's omniscient knowledge of parts of the future related with that part of God's mind which is unaware of future contingents? It appears that Pinnock and Sanders could say that God's Being is one and does not operate from two distinct compartments. However, how then would this be a

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[82] Ibid., 120.

[83] cf. Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate*, 68. The example is appropriate since open proponents often cite Calcidius as a historical precedent for their view of God's knowledge (cf. *God of the Possible*, 115).

[84] Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16-17.

"bipolar" nature and not monopolar? In the final analysis, open theism appears to be caught on the horns of a three-fold dilemma. For if we can know and speak of a changing pole in God, how then do we speak of the other unchanging pole? If we can speak and relate to the unchanging pole, how is this any different from the classical view? If it is argued that the unchanging pole allows for its own minor change, then it really is not an unchanging pole and, therefore, God is wholly changing. If the unchanging (i.e., absolute and necessary) cannot relate to the changing (i.e., relative and contingent), how then do the poles of God relate to each other?[85]

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[85] Open theists could argue that I am dividing God up into poles and misinterpreting them as too rigid of a distinction. However, the to claim God is "bipolar" and to describe him as "absolute and relative" and "necessary and contingent" (see Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, 33-34) and so forth implies a real qualitative difference between poles. If there were no ontological difference between poles, one could not have a *bipolar* God since to differ by nothing is not to differ at all.