



## A Small Catechism for Univocity in Theology

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**A**bstract: The following article discusses the problem of univocity in theology. It considers the classical dilemma that univocal terms used of God and human beings compromise God's mystery while terms used equivocally of each compromise knowledge of God. One solution is that all terms used of both are analogous. Critical arguments against univocity, equivocality, and analogy are considered. Modern analysis of analogy identifies significant problems with the theory, prompting reconsideration of arguments against univocity since equivocality holds no promise for theological knowledge. Our thesis is that these arguments have plausible responses and propose a way of conceiving univocity in theology.

### Keywords:

Analogy, Equivocity,  
Imago Dei, Theological  
Language, Univocity

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## **I**ntroduction

Our discussion focuses on the problem of univocity in theology. The two uses of ‘bank’ in the sentence, ‘near the bank of the river, a bank was robbed,’ mean something different. A standard view of equivocity says that terms similarly differ in meaning when used literally for God and humans. Likewise, a standard view of univocity says the opposite; terms used literally for God and humans have the same meaning. This problem gives rise to a classical dilemma, explained in section II, because equivocity ends in agnosticism if our terms mean something different, whereas univocity looks anthropomorphic, denying God’s mystery. Some theologians like W. Norris Clarke avoid both horns of the dilemma via media, explained in section III, holding that terms refer analogously to God, preserving both propositional theological knowledge and God’s mystery. Our assessment

of analogy is presented in section IV; analogies require univocal senses of dis/similarity and measurement to avoid a vicious infinite regress leading to irresolvable equivocity. Section V reengages the dilemma using the Twin Earth case in the modern philosophy of language to explain how univocity or partial univocity-equivocity and God’s mystery can be consistently construed. In section VI, the objection from anthropomorphism is considered and resolved using the *Imago Dei*, according to which univocity can be understood as theomorphic on the order of ontological priority. Section VII concludes that careful construal of univocity or partial univocity-equivocity preserves theological knowledge and God’s brute

mystery, thus resolving the classical dilemma.

### **The Classical Dilemma in Theology: Knowledge and Mystery of God**

Some identify two conflicting strands of biblical tradition. On the one hand, texts mention God's characteristics. Jeremiah 51:15 states, 'It is he [God] who made the earth by his power; who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens' (NRSV all quotations). On the other hand, texts also mention God's mystery and incomprehensibility. Isaiah 55:8-9 states, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' These biblical

traditions pull in opposite directions.<sup>1</sup>

Neoplatonism's doctrine of the One-and-the-Many creates a similar dilemma. On the principle that simpler entities explain the more complex ones, Neoplatonism teaches that the ultimate ground of being has no positive properties, is utterly simple, and transcends all its effects. This ultimate being is called the One. According to this metaphysic, the universe is a multi-tiered hierarchical sequence of horizontal or side-real orders of being established by successive emanations proceeding from the One, to the intellect, soul, sense realm, and matter.<sup>2</sup> Human language is far removed from the divine archetype. For this reason, the same dilemma arises because the ideas of human theological knowledge and divine mystery pull in different directions.

The tradition that God's characteristics are knowable by

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<sup>1</sup> For texts on God's dis/similarity to humans, see *Pseudo-Dionysius* (NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 55-57.

<sup>2</sup> Pauliina Remes *Neoplatonism* (CA: University of California Press, 2008), 58.

univocal terms of God and humans grants too much knowledge. This compromises God's mystery and looks suspiciously anthropomorphic. The tradition that God's mystery is incompatible with univocal terms of God and humans leads to agnosticism, compromising knowledge of God's characteristics. How, then, are terms of God and humans best understood?

### **A**nalogy

Based on qualitative difference and distance, Neoplatonism holds that human language can only ever refer analogically to the higher levels of reality and being (first theorized by Proclus).<sup>1</sup> The theory of analogy has changed in various

ways throughout history. It may be marked crudely by stages – Neoplatonism (Proclus), early Christian theology (Pseudo-Dionysius), Islamic theology (Averroes), and scholasticism (Aquinas) – but it is still used in contemporary theology. Analogy was only considered partially helpful by radical apophatic mystics like Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, who denied any positive knowledge of God. For these theologians, God remains ineffable, so language must fail. However, most scholastics were dedicated to a broader range of propositional theological truth because of the type and scope of theological information presented in the Bible. For these more modest apophatic theologians like Aquinas,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the initial formulation in theology, see Proclus (412-485 CE) *The Elements of Theology* Prop. 18. *The Elements of Theology* Translation with Commentary by E.R. Dodds (1963, 1992), 21, see xxxi cf. 4 for parallels with Aquinas. Also, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 133-41.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes* Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province 4 vol. 1 1<sup>a</sup>

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QQ.1-119 (MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 59-72. Ria van der Lecq 'Logic and Theories of Meaning in the Late 13<sup>th</sup> and Early 14<sup>th</sup> Century Including the Modistae' *Handbook of the History of Logic, Volume 2* (Elsevier, 2008), 347-388. For Aquinas's arguments against univocity and equivocality, see Bernard Montagnes *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être d'après Saint Thomas D'Aquin*,

analogy bridges the gulf between God's mystery and human language, preserving theological truth. Still, a question about its efficiency arises, which is the concern of our present discussion focusing on W. Norris Clarke's theory. Clarke follows a Thomistic *via media* between univocity and equivocity that terms of God and humans are analogous.<sup>1</sup> His Thomistic account rejects any univocity of terms used of God and humans, focusing on the lived use of concepts in judgments. These intentional acts refer to the subject-predicate synthesis of things in

the real world. Judgments look through the abstract meanings of concepts to the things signified. It then adjusts the concepts' contents to what is known about their concrete realizations. In this case, concepts have a variegated range of application: 'the concept itself...does not mention or contain within its expressed content *any* ... particular modes in any of its predications, but is understood as transcending them all.'<sup>2</sup>

Clarke explains the construction of analogous concepts, by which he means proper and intrinsic terms, in the following

Philosophes Médiévaux Tome VI (1963), 181-183.

<sup>1</sup> W. Norris Clarke 'Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language about God' *Explorations in Metaphysics* (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, 2008), 123-149. The majority of Thomistic commentators since the 1950's root Aquinas's analogy in judgments (Gilson, Maurer, Sherry, Ross, Klubertanz, Burrell, de Lubac, and Mascall) rather than Cajetan's older theory of the analogous concept. For more on the change, see Gregory P. Rocca *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2004, 2008), 154-159. Our discussion critiques Clarke's judgment position, but

two of Hochschild's arguments for the analogous concept are worth listing: 1. the idea of analogical concepts comports well with the medieval account of signification and imposition; and 2. judgment is consistent with univocity. J.P. Hochschild *The Semantics of Analogy* (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 56-64. The readings of Mondin and Rocca also support 2. B. Mondin *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 58 cf. 2, 60 cf. 2. Rocca *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 165-173.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke 'Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language about God', 128.

way. First, we judge ‘some basic *similarity-in-difference*’ or proportional similarity across a range of subjects, e.g., different degrees of being, quality, etc., the similarities of which remain qualitatively distinct. He similarly explains construction of univocal concepts, only in this case we judge a sufficient identity or negligible difference between the range of subjects, e.g., forms, structures, lack of qualitative variation, etc. These things are often classified into the same species-genus. This second step fixes the meaning of concepts with that which the concepts objectively signify. Clarke’s idea is that the content of concepts used analogically remains indeterminate until fixed in a concrete-lived

experience. This determination only involves a judgment about *similarity-in-difference* or proportional similarity and does not require univocity.<sup>1</sup> The concepts can be fitted and refitted to different concrete experiences, so they have an infinite scope. As Clarke explains, these are ‘the most remarkable and distinctive features of analogous concepts, especially the ones of broadest range: it is in fact impossible to define what we mean by an analogous concept, to *grasp* the similarity involved....’<sup>2</sup>

### Assessment

The classic argument against analogy is that it requires univocity, the linguistic property it means to exclude.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Psychologists distinguish between two different types of judgments regarding family resemblances and categorization. One is an external, quick, unreflective brain process whereas the other is a mindful consideration. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence ‘Concepts and Cognitive Science’ *Concepts: Core Readings* (The MIT Press, 1999), 33. In our estimation, the former is unhelpful to defenders of analogy since it involves

brain processes and not naming in language. Hence, our discussion focuses on considered, mindful judgments.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke ‘Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language about God’, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Duns Scotus *Philosophical Writings* Translated by Allan Wolter (IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). W.P. Alston ‘Aquinas on Theological Predication: A

Analogy says that ‘loves’ in ‘God loves the world’ and ‘Joseph loves James’ has a similar or analogous meaning but not the same. If not univocal, the similarity relation is either equivocal or analogical. The problem is that analogies require univocal senses of dis/similarity and measurement. Equivocal and analogical similarity cannot explain how ‘love’ is similar in both cases because the meanings of dis/similarity and measurement are unclear and not fixed. Analogical similarity tries to move beyond this problem by identifying several shared properties between the analogs. However, univocal dis/similarity measurement senses must be introduced to judge the relation between these properties. Analogies must posit yet another set of shared properties, ad infinitum. This

leads to a vicious infinite regress.

Elaborating on this point, consider different evaluations of the dis/similarity relation between the predicates of various conceptual frameworks. A conceptual framework has minimally three features: 1. a first-order factually interpreted formal language (L); 2. a set of extra-logical primitive predicates ( $\lambda$ ); and 3. a set of meaning postulates and general metaphysical and empirical laws governing  $\lambda$ .<sup>1</sup> The goal is to explain how two counterpart properties,  $O_1$  from conceptual framework  $\lambda_1 = \{O_1, \dots, O_n\}$  of  $L_1$  and  $P_1$  from conceptual framework  $\lambda_2 = \{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$  of  $L_2$ , are similar.

Measurement of the dis/similarity between terms permits different theoretical explanations. It may be metric (spatial: distance, closeness), ordinal (order in a series:

Look Backward and a Look Forward’ *Reasoned Faith* Edited by Eleonore Stump (Echo Point Books & Media, 1993, 2014), 145-178.

<sup>1</sup> Raimo Tuomela ‘Analogy and Distance’ *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie / Journal for General Philosophy of Science* Vol. 11, No. 2 (1980), 278-279.

greater, lesser), empirical (ask people, look at), etc. The explanations apply easily to cases involving members of a natural family (color = red, white, blue...), but these are not abundant when comparing different conceptual systems. One solution is to identify a small set of second-order predicates  $F = \{F_1, \dots, F_n\}$ , comparing predicates between  $\lambda_1$  and  $\lambda_2$ . For example, the similarity of algebraic ordering relations, such as simple order, partial order, strict partial order, etc., is defined by the number of shared second-order predicates in each order (e.g., reflexiveness, transitivity, connectedness, etc.). Similarly, the more second-order predicates that different predicates of  $\lambda_1$  and  $\lambda_2$  share, the more comparable they are. The fewer they share, the less comparable.

Irrespective of how the measurement is characterized, 1-3 and  $F$  must enable satisfactory judgments about the closeness relation between the

predicates from  $\lambda_1 = \{O_1, \dots, O_n\}$  and  $\lambda_2 = \{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$  of  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ . Otherwise, a higher third-order predicate is required to judge the relation, and then another ad infinitum. Since we always make these comparisons, the recourse to higher-order predicates must stop somewhere. The second-order relation is the simplest and most natural place to stop the regress.

The univocal dis/similarity predicate is the hinge meaning postulate enabling the comparison of primitive predictions from  $\lambda_1 = \{O_1, \dots, O_n\}$  and  $\lambda_2 = \{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$  of  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ . The measurement of dis/similarity also requires univocal measurement (higher-order) predicates to account for the degree of comparability. Otherwise, what counts as close in  $L_1$  may not be close in  $L_2$ . Thus, no judgment about dis/similarity and measurement can be made without univocity because there would then be no ground from which to judge how any given predicate from

$\lambda_1 = \{O_1, \dots, O_n\}$  is dis/similar to  $\lambda_2 = \{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$  of L1 and L2.

For this reason, it is hard to see how Clarke's judgment process, 'seeing' through concepts to determine content, preserves theological knowledge through analogy. First, God is not a concrete thing or object of physical perception. So, judgment could not fit conceptual content to the concrete. Second, recourse to natural revelation (arguments in natural theology) or special revelation (revelation from God disclosed in religious scriptures) appears unavailing since conceptual reasoning requires some univocal content. For example, arguments from 'causation' to the existence of

God as the creator of the universe need a univocal sense of cause to avoid the fallacy of equivocation. Clarke meets this problem by claiming that a judgment about similarity-in-difference helps determine the content of analogies, but this requires univocal senses of dis/similarity and measurement. This contradicts the purpose of using analogy without univocity. Clarke cannot help himself to a univocal sense of similarity-in-difference.

Without univocal senses of dis/similarity and measurement, their meanings are not fixed, so analogical judgments cannot permit the comparison and measurement of God and humans. 1 God could be infinitely different from the way

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<sup>1</sup> This is the phenomenal conclusion of Ernst Cassirer's *concentration down to a point* explanation for content formation using something like opaque concepts, *Language and Myth* Translated by Susanne K. Langer (NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1946, 1953), 26-27. For Clarke's direct realism, in place of Cassirer's veil of perception, opaque concepts filter out univocal content permitting the continuous refitting of content to object. Since God is not an

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object of direct physical perception, though, the judgment of analogy 'seeing through' concepts cannot fit content to theological concepts and so cannot overcome the discursive intellect's theological agnosticism. The same restriction applies to other lines of reasoning from natural or special revelation. Following David Burrell *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (Yale University Press, 1973), Clarke is

judgments or concepts of analogy characterize God, and this tout court eliminates theological analogies ensemble. Even if Clarke takes the similarity relation as a brute given in direct religious experience, 1 the infinite qualitative difference between God and humans 2 arrests analogical judgments. According to this response,

judgments of analogy explain the similarity relation as ‘infinitely distant yet similar.’ Hence, whether semantic or judgmental, Clarke’s account permits a reduction of the relation between x and y to a trivial relation, so it fails to distinguish between analogies and any relation that can hold between two pairs whatsoever.<sup>3</sup> This fails to satisfy the

influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (The Macmillan Company, 1953), 1-19. The contents of words/concepts (e.g., ‘game’) are built up by use. Étienne Gilson replaced Cajetan’s reading with the judgment of proportion around the time of Wittgenstein’s work, *Jean Duns Scot* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1952), 101-102. On Burrell’s and Clarke’s Gilson-Wittgenstein synthesis of analogical judgment, concepts function like prototypes: the contents of structured concepts/mental representations are built up or encoded by the properties their objects have in their extensions. Unfortunately, the theory is beset by the same problems as prototypes: 1. the problem of prototypical primes (the rate of concept classification/association should differ for well defined-clear and prototypical-opaque concepts, but they do not display different typicality effects); 2. the problem of ignorance and error (during the encoding or ‘clearing up’ process, categorization will both include things that do not fall under the concept but share categorical characteristics and

exclude things that do fall under the concept but lack categorical characteristics); 3. the problem of missing prototypes (many concepts lack typicality judgments); and 4. the problem of compositionality (some concepts are compositional and so do not have a single prototype). Margolis and Laurence ‘Concepts and Cognitive Science’, 32-43. <sup>1</sup> This also appears to be J.F. Ross’s position in *Thought and World: The Hidden Necessities* (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 63-64, 83, 97, 142.

<sup>2</sup> G.P. Rocca ‘Aquinas on God-Talk: Hovering Over the Abyss’ *Theological Studies* Vol. 54 (1993), 641-661. D.B. Hart ‘The Offering of Names: Metaphysics, Nihilism, and Analogy’ *The Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 3.

<sup>3</sup> This problem even arises on versions of analogy permitting univocal content for formal or logical properties but not substantive ones. For this reason, it is hard to see how Clarke’s position does not end in radical apophatic theology like John

necessary features of analogies: that there is a specific kind of identity or similarity between the analogs, that these similarities are measurable, and that they can be shown to be similar enough to avoid triviality or equivocity. Thus, Clarke's theory still fails to include the necessary conditions for any semantic or judgmental definition of analogy deserving of the name. It is, in effect, not analogy but irresolvable equivocity. Once more, analogy reduces to agnosticism.

To summarize, analogies require univocity to permit a judgment about any analogous dis/similarity relation of God and humans. Otherwise, there is no way to distinguish between true/false or in/appropriate analogies. Without a univocal base, there is no way to tell which terms of God and humans are analogous. Even a sharp

distinction between semantics and judgments of analogy stressing direct access to the similarity relation is unavailing. Clarke's analogy reduces to equivocation and agnosticism. This conclusion warrants a reconsideration of the classical dilemma.

### **Reengaging the Classical Dilemma: Twin Earth, Univocity, and God's Mystery**

Whereas Putnam's Twin Earth argument is restricted to language,<sup>1</sup> Burge and others extend it to the content of thought and take it to show that sense does not determine reference.<sup>2</sup> The thought experiment raises specific problems for natural kind terms and proper names, e.g., water, Socrates, etc., because their references are not traditionally

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Hick's *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Yale University Press, 1989, 1992), 165-175, 239, 246-249.

1 Hilary Putnam 'The Meaning of 'Meaning' (Excerpt)' *Philosophy of Mind*

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(NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 581-596.

2 Tyler Burge 'Individualism and the Mental (Excerpt)' *Philosophy of Mind*, 597-607.

taken to be context sensitive.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, it helps clarify problems with analogy in theology and explains the logical consistency of univocity or partial univocity-equivocity with God's mystery, given the context sensitivity of 'Yahweh' as a proper name for God in the Bible (Exodus 3:14, etc.).<sup>2</sup> With that said, consider Twin Earth.

Twin Earth Imagine a planet virtually identical to Earth in some far-off region of space. Call this planet Twin Earth. Earth and Twin Earth are similar in all but one respect. On Twin Earth, the chemical compound of the stuff that is drinkable, clear, potable, and in the oceans is XYZ rather than H<sub>2</sub>O. The substance XYZ is indistinguishable from water at average temperatures and pressures. If an astronaut, Oscar, were to land on Twin Earth,

he would report back to Earth the following message, 'water is XYZ on Twin Earth'; and if an astronaut from Twin Earth, Oscar<sub>te</sub>, were to land on Earth he would report back to Twin Earth the following message, 'water is H<sub>2</sub>O on Earth'.

Now, rewind the clock to the 1200's CE. The idea behind the case is that both Earthlings-Twin Earthlings used the same univocal description for water-water<sub>te</sub>, 'the liquid that flows in rivers, quenches thirst, etc.,' and came only later to discover their different molecular structures. Thus, the inhabitants of Earth-Twin Earth each use the same univocal description for water-water<sub>te</sub> even though some semantic value appears to be contingent on features of the world.

According to Burge, the identical internal brain states of

1 Our discussion defines context as the context of an utterance, e.g., either a concrete utterance event or an abstract parameter (speaker, time, place, etc.)

2 John M. Frame *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship*, Vol. 2 (NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2002), 25-27.

Oscar-Oscar<sub>te</sub> fail to individuate content. Thus, externalism is needed. Consequently, the word ‘water’ has a different meaning on Earth than on Twin Earth, so they are not univocal. For our discussion, externalism refers to semantic theories of meaning where contents are built up from extensions, e.g., sets of things or objects in the world.<sup>1</sup> However, there are classic problems with pure externalism. First, pure externalism has trouble with substitution in opaque contexts. If the meaning of a word is

identical with its extension, then co-referential terms should have the same meaning and be substitutable *salva veritate*. However, consider the following two propositional attitude reports (S believes that P):

C) Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly.

C’) Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly.

Externalism says ‘Clark Kent’ and ‘Superman’ have the same meaning since both have the same extension, but this means that C-C’ should have the same

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1 Following David J. Chalmers, a sentence’s extension is its truth value, a singular term’s extension is its referent, and a general term’s extension is the set of all things included in the term. ‘Two-Dimensional Semantics’ *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language* (Oxford University Press, 2006, 2008), 574. Bertrand Russell’s singular proposition is an extensional account of the content of proper names, ‘On Denoting’ *Mind* (Vol. 14, No. 56 (1905), 479-493. Alfred Tarski proposes a wholly extensional theory, ‘The Semantic Conception of Truth: and the Foundations

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of Semantics’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1944), 341-376. S.A. Kripke holds an extensional theory for proper names but not predicates, *Naming and Necessity* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1972, 1999). Externalism can be defined in different ways. One account holds that a change in reference only requires a shift in meaning, even if extensions are not taken up as contents. Our discussion permits different terminological adjustments depending on how someone defines externalism.

truth value. Believing that Superman can fly should be enough to think that Clark Kent can fly, but they do not have the same truth value. Lois does not believe that 'Clark Kent can fly' because she does not know that Kent is Superman: C is false, C' is true.<sup>1</sup> Extensionality cannot account for the significance of the cognitive difference between both propositional attitude reports, so content cannot be entirely external. In our assessment, a hybrid theory of propositions (combining a rigid descriptive proposition<sup>2</sup> and a singular proposition) presents the most promising

solution to this problem.<sup>3</sup> However, it introduces some internal descriptive content to accommodate the semantic level and some external content to accommodate differences on the cognitive level. This permits univocity on the semantic level, so it does not look open to advocates of analogy in theology.

Second, externalism cannot account for the meaning of vacuous terms because it takes the objects in the world as contents. For example, the contents of statements like

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1 Chalmers 'The Components of Content' *Philosophy of Mind*, 608.

2 According to Kripke, a term T is a rigid designator iff. def. it refers to the same object in all possible worlds (or iff. it refers to the same object in all possible worlds in which that object exists and refers to nothing in worlds where it does not exist). Kripke *Naming and Necessity*, 3-15, 48-49. Rigid descriptions, then, apply the concept of rigidity to descriptions and function from contexts of utterance to truth-conditions in possible worlds. J.J. Katz 'Has the Description Theory of Names Been Refuted?' *Meaning and Method* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 31-61. The senses of rigid descriptions

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determine sense properties and relations in linguistic meaning but not reference. Our discussion defines possible worlds as 'alternative worlds in terms of which one may think of possibility...'. On possible worlds semantics, 'such notions as those of validity, soundness, and completeness can be defined for modal logic in terms of models constructed from sets of alternative "worlds."' R.M. Adams 'Possible Worlds' *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy Second Edition* (Cambridge University Press, 1995, 2009), 724.

3 Michael Nelson 'Descriptivism Defended' *Nous* Vol. 36, No. 3 (2002), 408-436.

‘Sherlock Holmes, fairies, etc., do not exist’ would be ‘\_\_\_ do not exist,’ but this is not what the claims mean. On this view, different sentence-tokens (with different vacuous terms) of the same sentence type mean the same things when they do not. One response identifies the extension of vacuous terms with fictional abstracta. Still, this move controversially requires ontological commitment about abstracta and is widely rejected by Thomists who traditionally think of abstracta-like essences and natures as concrete properties of things.<sup>1</sup>

Third, external accounts of proper names create too many

counterintuitive puzzles, and the responses fail to convince. For example, when two people with the same name (Jane Doe) meet and say, ‘We have the same name,’ they say something false. Also, when two people with the same last surname marry, say John and Jane Smith, Jane could change her name from ‘Smith’ to ‘Smith.’ However, it makes no sense to say that a name was changed from ‘Smith’ to ‘Smith.’<sup>2</sup>

In our assessment, popular accounts of two-dimensional semantics on which content is construed as purely internal or an internal-external hybrid best handle Twin Earth.<sup>3</sup> Two-

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1 William Lane Craig *God and Abstract Objects. The Coherence of Theism: Aseity* (Springer, 2017), 146.

2 J.J. Katz ‘The End of Millianism: Multiple Bearers, Improper Names, and Compositional Meaning’ *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 98, No. 3 (2001), 137-166.

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3 Mark Balaguer explains how internal-external theories of propositional content can be made indistinguishable, ‘Is There a Fact of the Matter Between Direct Reference Theory and (Neo-) Fregeanism?’ *Philosophical Studies* Vol. 154, No. 1 (2011), 53-78.

dimensionalism is variously defined. On popular accounts, it includes semantic theories with double-indexing to contexts and circumstances with primary-secondary intensions and a two-dimensional intension or function from context-circumstance pairs to diagonal propositions. On one-dimension, primary intensional dependency on the world is represented functionally from contexts to truth-conditions in scenarios (water refers to H<sub>2</sub>O but could have referred to XYZ). On another dimension, secondary intensional dependency is represented functionally from circumstances of evaluation to truth-conditions in possible

worlds (the contingent discovery fixes the extension for all possible worlds). Additionally, a two-dimensional intension is an ordered pair of scenarios-possible worlds or contexts-circumstances that pick out truth conditions. It has an internal-external value, the first actual and second counterfactual, and develops Kripke's ideas about contingent discoveries of necessary truths (if water is H<sub>2</sub>O in our world, then it must be in all possible worlds; were water XYZ in our world, then it would have been in all possible worlds). Read diagonally in the following table, the values are H<sub>2</sub>O-XYZ.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Chalmers 'Two-Dimensional Semantics', 574-606. 'The Foundations of Two-Dimensional Semantics' Two-Dimensional Semantics Edited by

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Manuel García-Carpintero and Josep Macià (Oxford University Press, 2006, 2011), 55-140. For criticism, see Scott



Table 1

	H <sub>2</sub> O-world	XYZ-world	...
H <sub>2</sub> O-world	H <sub>2</sub> O	H <sub>2</sub> O	...
XYZ-world	XYZ	XYZ	...

For our purposes, internal theories of semantic meaning identify contents with intensions (e.g., functions that may or may not include rigid descriptions, modes of presentation, characters),<sup>1</sup> whereas internal-external hybrid theories identify it with both intensions-extensions (e.g., modes of presentation, characters, etc., + extensions).<sup>2</sup>

1 Following Chalmers, the intensions of sentences are functions to truth at possible worlds iff. the sentences are true there, the intensions of singular terms map possible worlds with the terms' referents in those worlds, the intensions of general terms map possible worlds to the sets of things that fall under the terms in that world. 'Two-Dimensional Semantics', 574-575. Again, internalism can be defined in various ways. It may be taken to refer to the space inside a person's head, and this may include physical properties of the brain. It may be defined as perspectival, etc. Also once again, our discussion permits of terminological adaptation depending on how the terms are defined.  
 2 Character is a fixed value of indexicals like 'I'. This narrow content is distinctive

Each severs sense from reference and further relativizes reference to contexts in combination with primary intensions and the Causal Theory of Reference (CTR) for initial demonstrations.<sup>3</sup> Primary intensions may be modes of presentation,<sup>4</sup> rigid descriptions, or characters. This way, internalism distinguishes between content, truth

since indexicals also change extensions. David Kaplan 'Demonstratives' Themes from Kaplan Edited by Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (Oxford University Press, 1989), 481-563, at 505-507. In this case, contents are abstracta.

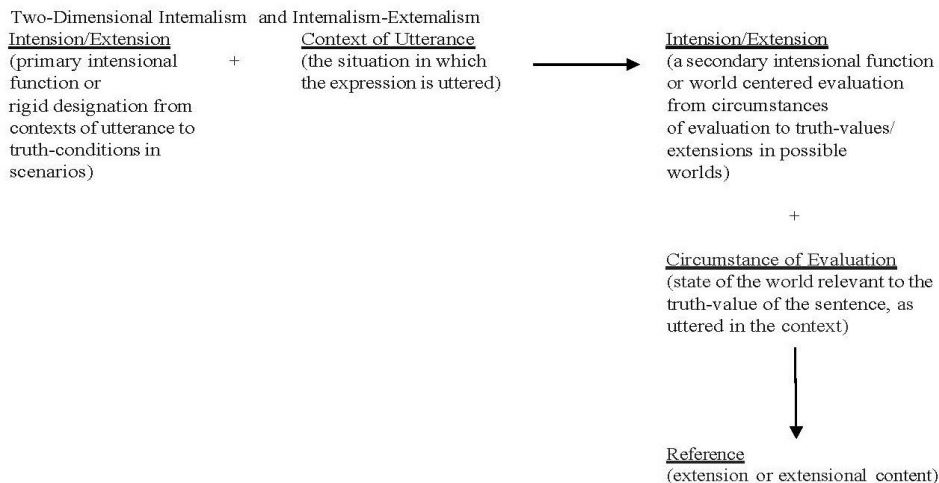
3 The CTR explains how terms acquire specific references based on evidence and the causal chains of their usage originating in what Kripke calls a baptism event. Naming and Necessity, 96-97.

4 This is how Frege treats indexicals. Meaning is relativized to contexts under modes of presentation (cognitive significance). Gottlob Frege 'Sense and Reference' The Philosophical Review Vol. 57, No. 3 (1948), 209-230.

conditions, and values. Similarly, on internalism-externalism, internal content may be what pre-scientific Aquinas-Aquinas<sub>te</sub> meant about water-water<sub>te</sub> based on their shared primary intensions. The external content includes the extensions of water-water<sub>te</sub> and

these atomic natures remained mysterious or unknown. Thus, internalism offers an account of univocity, whereas internalism-externalism offers a hybrid account of partial univocity-equivocity. The following figure provides a helpful visual aid.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 2



Consider the meaning of ‘Yahweh’ on Twin Earth. In this case, Yahweh<sub>te</sub> does some of the same things on Twin Earth as Yahweh does on Earth, just as water<sub>te</sub> functions about water,

and these events/encounters are recorded in the Bible<sub>te</sub>. Some descriptive content will be univocal, ranging over the same descriptive types of events and actions, e.g., ‘maker of

1 Adapted from Jeff Speaks ‘Theories of Meaning’ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2010, 2019). url:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meaning/#CharContContCirc>.

covenants, worker of miracles, etc.,’ but the references are different.<sup>1</sup> On either two-dimensional accounts construing content as internal or internal-external, it makes sense to say that Aquinas-Aquinas<sub>te</sub> knows something about water-water<sub>te</sub> (‘potable, flows in the rivers, etc.’), could use univocal or partially univocal descriptions, but do not know about water’s-water<sub>te</sub>’s microphysical structures. *À propos*, so too, where Yahweh-Yahweh<sub>te</sub> are the contextually determined bearers of ‘Yahweh’-‘Yahweh<sub>te</sub>’ that may/may not take the extension

as an additional dimension of content, univocity permits knowledge of their characteristics without saying anything about their φύσις or ουσία (nature or essence).<sup>2</sup> Stated another way, univocity does not imply knowledge of the nature of the truth condition or extension – the ‘stuff’ of God. On either account, there is still room for brute mystery.<sup>3</sup> Theoretically, the baptism event involves the first experiences of Yahweh by humans (on something like dualistic interactionism) during which humans began referring to ‘Yahweh’. The CTR is satisfied

1 For discussion of the pure meta-linguistic theory’s account of the sense of a description for proper names, reference, and multiple bearers, see Katz ‘The End of Millianism: Multiple Bearers, Improper Names, and Compositional Meaning’, 137-166. Following Katz, our discussion holds that the senses of proper names are not ambiguous, but they are referentially equivocal. Specific reference for a proper name is resolved by the CTR in different baptism events and their following etiological chains.

2 W.J. Wainwright ‘Theology and Mystery’ *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 89. The ineffability of God’s nature may be like

the ineffability of mental qualia in the philosophy of mind.

3 Some phenomenal concepts, properties, etc., can be fitted into two-dimensional frameworks, e.g., the distinction between emotional/belief-state qualia, but real propositional knowledge requires realism about some concepts, properties, etc. Complete phenomenalism precludes real propositional truth, knowledge in theology, like the radical apophatic mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius. For explanation of phenomenal concepts, beliefs, properties on two-dimensional realism, see Martine Nida-Rümelin ‘Phenomenal Belief, Phenomenal Concepts, and Phenomenal Properties in a Two-Dimensional Framework’ *Two-Dimensional Semantics*, 205-219.

as are references to our own mental states. The question of theological truth and propositional truth is independent. While it is possible that pre-scientific earthlings could have discovered water to be an empty extension as on Boghossian's Dry Earth, this need not mean they did not know things about water short of commitment to skepticism with its controversial commitment to bootstrapping. This condition leads to an infinite regress, e.g., for S to know P, 'S must know that they know P', for S to know that they know P, 'S must know that they know that they know P', etc., and impractically blocks knowledge about far too much. Simply put, knowledge does not require certainty. A realist about

religious experience may hold that our language preserves theological propositional truth so long as Yahweh is personal, loving, etc., that this can be known in experience and through other means, but it does not require certainty. Theoretically, knowledge may be supplemented by continued religious experience, natural revelation, and special revelation.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of internal-external hybrid theories of content, the predicates in the descriptions are not entirely univocal, taking some equivocal content, but they are not entirely equivocal either since they take some univocal content. So, even though they do not entirely mean the same things, they do not mean something entirely

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1 On religious experience as a means of knowing God, see W.P. Alston *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cornell University Press, 1991, 1993). On arguments from natural theology, see *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* Edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 2012). The purpose of our discussion is not to attempt a proof of God's existence, however, but

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to show that univocity is necessary for the types of theological propositions many religious people take to be true, such as 'God loves me', etc. It also labors to show that such a theory can be coherently construed. Our position permits both of nominal and real content as well. See W.P. Alston 'Yes, Virginia, There is a World' *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* Vol. 52, No. 6 (1979), 779-808.

different either. Both pure internal and internal-external hybrid theories of content are inconsistent with analogy as traditionally construed in theology.<sup>1</sup>

A pure externalist theory of content holds that ‘water’ has an entirely different meaning in the languages/thoughts of Aquinas-Aquinas<sub>te</sub>. Despite the two problems above with externalism, defenders of analogy may seek to block the univocal content of God and humans because their natures or beings differ. The position is motivated by what is thought to be the infinite qualitative difference between the beings of God and humans. This route

looks unpromising because the description ‘flows in the rivers, quenches thirst,’ could still be univocal of both water-water<sub>te</sub>. Different natures are consistent with univocal descriptions, as are different ‘beings’ with a univocal sense of ‘self-identity.’<sup>2</sup> What else could ‘self-identity’ mean across different orders of being except being identical with oneself, regardless of how distant the orders may be? Extensional accounts of content for one- or two-place predicates permit univocity since the sets containing the extensions exemplify the relevant property, and everything in the specified relation maintains the same

1 Someone might fault our use of intensional semantics by raising problems with possible worlds. J.F. Ross ‘The Crash of Modal Metaphysics’ *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 43, No. 2 (1989), 251-279. However, Two-Dimensionalism can also be construed using epistemic intensions instead of possible worlds. Chalmers ‘Two-Dimensional Semantics’, 585-589. This is one way of side-stepping the objection requiring only some terminological reformulations.

2 Necessary self-identity follows from axioms of modal logic’s S5 system and

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the accessibility relation on a Kripke frame. See C.I. Lewis and C.H. Langford *Symbolic Logic* (1932, 1959). Kripke *Naming and Necessity*, 3-5, 97-105, 114 cf. 56. Similarly, Alvin Plantinga *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press, 1974), 57-58, 81-87. The deeper problem here is that the thesis of analogy (that being is stratified) requires a language that straddles the different orders of being, and this seems impossible to even state without violating the terms of the thesis itself.

members. As these sets change, their meanings may change, but their membership theoretically remains the same for a time. Univocal predication still holds in these instances.

### **The Anthropomorphic Objection** **Against Univocity and Response**

The primary argument against univocity is that it leads to anthropomorphism. Univocity vacillates between something like a god from the Greek pantheon (Zeus) and pantheism (attributing divine qualities to the world) if unmitigated. In our estimation, the key to responding to this problem lies in the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*. This doctrine is mentioned only five times in the Bible (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; and James 3:9). The tradition in Genesis 1:26-27 reads, ‘Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...”’, and Paul refers to the doctrine in 1 Corinthians 11:7, ‘For a man ought not to

have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God...’. How are these texts to be interpreted? What does it mean to be made in God’s image?

Our discussion focuses on three competing interpretations of the *Imago Dei* and two subspecies of a more general interpretation. The first two interpretations relate it to a conception of human nature. In the first one, human nature is identified as a rational soul. The second one identifies human nature with an innate sanctity. The third interpretation holds that it is the function of humans as counterparts or representatives of God in the world, e.g., ruler or king. These theories are logically consistent, but theologians present them as competing views.

Advocates of the functional interpretation point to ancient Near Eastern texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia, where the ‘image of God’ is used for monarchs and leaders. The problem with this view is that

the image is used generally of humans in the Bible, so the biblical uses do not correspond to the other cultural uses. The fact that the Old Testament nowhere links the ‘image of God’ with kings or leaders suggests that ‘it is best not to allow biblical (or extra-biblical) royal notions to hold sway in matters of interpretation.’<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Genesis 9:6 connects ‘punishment for taking a human life’ with the ‘image of God,’ and this moves beyond the functional view toward the sanctity of human nature position. The more natural reading is to interpret words like ‘image,’ ‘likeness,’ and ‘reflection’ as referring to ontology and not mere functionality. Fretheim agrees: ‘At a basic level, the image of God has to do with the identity of human beings, that which is intrinsic to their very being.’<sup>2</sup> Ironically, this ontological

similarity may be the basis for human rule over the Earth.

The two remaining views identify different conceptions of human nature. In our assessment, the most plausible understanding of the *Imago Dei* includes fundamental personal properties such as rationality, creativity, and relationality, as these provide the best account of human sanctity. In the absence of such nature, the ground of sanctity appears unfounded. In support, the Priestly account of creation presents an intelligent, creative, and relational God, emphasizing thought (word), creation, and the plural ‘...in our image....’ Given the closeness of the image with which humans relate to God, an attack on human life is considered an attack on God and could be punishable by death. This interpretation gives a creative spin to the problem of anthropomorphism. Since the

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1 T.E. Fretheim ‘Image of God’ *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* I-Ma

Volume 3 (TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 19.

2 Fretheim ‘Image of God’, 20.

reality of God was the primary datum of the ancients' religious experience, there is reason to hold that the personal has its origins in their experience. This was transferred to each other from an honored relationship with the gods.

Our response reverses the anthropomorphic direction – from humans to God – to a theomorphic one – from God to humans in the order of ontological priority. God is a

personal being, and humans relate to God as personal beings relate to personal beings.<sup>1</sup> In this fashion, terms like 'intelligence' and 'love' are univocal or partially univocal-equivocal because they have the same intensions and pick out the same property types.<sup>2</sup> Univocity is accommodated, even if only partially because God and humans can each be described as personal beings. Humans did not create God in their image.

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1 Arguments in support of God's personhood include: 1. God's free act of *creatio ex nihilo*; 2. The interpersonal triune relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 3. The personal name Yahweh; 4. God's covenantal interaction with Israel throughout history; and 5. God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. William Lane Craig and James D. Sinclair 'The Kalam Cosmological Argument' *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 191-194. William Hasker *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God*, *Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2013, 2017). Frame *The Doctrine of God*, 25-27, 209. John S. Feinberg *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God (II)*: Crossway Books, 2001), 225-231. R.T. Mullins *The End of the Timeless God*, *Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 156-194. Some object on the ground that personhood requires 'embodiment' in the right kind of way, but this account of personhood is controversial. For a defense of

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personhood and 'disembodiment' viz. consistency with divine timelessness, see William Lane Craig *God, Time, and Eternity. The Coherence of Theism II: Eternity* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2010), 43-55. In the end, the embodiment objection is overcome by the incarnation anyways.

2 Similarly, W.P. Alston develops a theory of univocity likening God's psychological states to functional states. The theory of functionalism allows for the multiple realization of mental states (love, belief, pain, etc.) in diverse organisms with very different make-up (humans, octopuses, aliens, angels, etc.). On this account, predicates can be used univocally of God's psychological states defined in terms of their inputs and outputs, but this does not say anything substantially about God. 'Functionalism and Theological Language' *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 64-80.

Instead, God created humans in God's image. Relational analogies and biblical texts present Jesus as the human face of God. Texts like Colossians 1:15, 'He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God,' and John 14:9, 'Whoever has seen me [Jesus] has seen the Father,' support our use of the *Imago Dei* to construe univocal predicates of God and humans as personal. In these types of cases, like Betrayal (Judas, Jesus) and Betrayal (Claudius, Denmark), it is more challenging to deny univocity.<sup>1</sup> What of the biblical traditions speaking in favor of God's mystery? Is a conception of divine mystery compatible with univocity in theology? Wainwright lists four different senses of mystery: 1. surprise with the unexpected; 2. confusion about the apparent inconsistency between an obscure notion (e.g., hell) and a shared notion (e.g., moral

sensibility rejecting infinite punishment); 3. epistemic (missing pertinent information); and 4. brute (irresolvable).<sup>2</sup> It is not likely that all of the relevant biblical texts fall neatly into just one category. The biblical authors sometimes used different senses of mystery, which must be determined case by case.

The theory of univocity in theology only appears to run into problems with category 4 of Wainwright's categories, and it is doubtful that Isaiah 55:8-9 expresses God's brute mystery. The text refers to vv. 6-7, wherein the wicked are instructed to forsake their ways and thoughts. Hence, God's ways and thoughts are not utterly mysterious but are contrary to wickedness. This contrast is highlighted by the spatial reference to the distance between Heaven (up there) and Earth (down here). The point of this contrast is that God may

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1 Joseph Little 'Analogy in Science: Where Do We Go from Here?' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* Vol. 30, No. 1 (2000), 78-80.

2 Wainwright 'Theology and Mystery', 78-102.

give grace at any time and not when humans would expect it. Supposing texts speak of God's brute mystery, the assumption that God's impenetrability is inconsistent with univocity is controversial. Twin Earth cases demonstrate the consistency of univocity or partial univocity-equivocity, theological propositional knowledge, and God's brute mystery.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the classical dilemma in theology is that terms used of God and humans can be neither univocal nor equivocal. Our discussion summarizes leading objections to both univocity and equivocity and argues that these arguments are not determinative. Recourse to the doctrine of analogy is unavailing because, along with equivocity, it leads to agnosticism. Our assessment of analogy shows that analogies presuppose univocity because univocal senses of dis/similarity and measurement are necessary for mindful analogical

judgments. Twin Earth cases also show how univocity or partial univocity-equivocity can be consistent with God's brute mystery. The charge that univocity leads to anthropomorphism is reversed: in light of the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, literally true univocal or partially univocal-equivocal descriptive terms are best understood as theomorphic. If theology is to move beyond propositional theological agnosticism, then univocity or partial univocity-equivocity and realism are necessary.

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