

Further Thoughts on Natural Theology, Metaphysics, and Analogy

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Abstract

In this article, I respond to each of the three authors who have engaged my book *God in Himself*. Regarding Gray Sutanto's response, I offer comments on his effort to integrate Schleiermacher and Calvin on the human "feeling of dependence" and the *sensus divinitatis* and to draw upon the insights of Bonaventure to frame our natural knowledge of God. Regarding Scott Swain's response, I seek to build on his thoughts about the necessary use of metaphysical concepts by considering some additional biblical material and by clarifying the way in which metaphysical concepts might be treated as developments of ordinary, common human knowledge of reality. Finally, regarding Dolf te Velde's response, I seek to clarify further why I think Scotus and Aquinas may not be too far apart on the nature of theological predication and why I think Aquinas' view of analogy and divine simplicity is still sufficient for confirming the veracity of Christian speech about God.

Keywords

Analogy, Duns Scotus, metaphysics, natural theology, Thomas Aquinas

I am grateful to Alden McCray for organizing this discussion and to Gray Sutanto, Scott Swain, Dolf te Velde, for taking the time to interact with the book *God in Himself* in a substantive and charitable manner. As I imagined, each of them has approached the book from a different angle, and each has done so with a gracious spirit and a desire to engage in constructive

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theological discourse. Instead of focusing more narrowly on potential quibbles about the book's representation of its subject matter, which can certainly have a place in analyzing a book, each interlocutor, it seems to me, has considered ways in which he might take certain themes from *God in Himself* and positively strengthen or develop our understanding of key points. In this response, I will attempt to do the same with their work, drawing attention to a few points these authors have brought forward and trying to develop our understanding of some of the important issues at stake.

Response to Gray Sutanto

First, Gray Sutanto has expressed a broad agreement with the trajectory of the book and focuses on developing the meaning of humanity's natural awareness of God. Sutanto elaborates on Herman Bavinck's concerns about natural theology and shows that Bavinck emphasizes humanity's dependence upon God for our knowledge of Him; God condescends to us and applies an "existential pressure" so that we may begin to know Him. More specifically, borrowing some of Friedrich Schleiermacher's terminology, Bavinck holds that God's presence and activity in the human soul yield a "feeling of dependence" upon God that precedes any process of reasoning about God. In addition, Sutanto retrieves the work of Augustine and Bonaventure on the doctrine of divine illumination in order to amplify the human person's dependence upon God for our knowledge of Him. While these epistemological considerations may at first seem quite removed from the practice of Christian ministry, they in fact have significant implications for evangelism and apologetics. In response to Sutanto's line of thought, I will offer three reflections.

First, it is encouraging that a book leaning heavily on the works of figures like Aquinas and the Reformed orthodox can find a warm reception in the response of a Bavinck scholar. (Though Sutanto is more than a Bavinck scholar, he is not less.) Of course, the warmth of the reception presumably would not surprise those who have appreciated Bavinck's engagement of earlier theologians and his catholic spirit. Nevertheless, because some (not all) advocates of Dutch Calvinism or "neo-Calvinism" can give the impression that Christian theology (especially in Aquinas) was fundamentally misguided until Abraham Kuyper, Bavinck, or Cornelius Van Til arrived, Sutanto's paper helps to break up caricatures and calls us to examine more closely where there are genuine points of continuity, discontinuity, and complementarity in various conceptions of our natural knowledge of God. In light of this, my sense is that Sutanto and I are co-laborers pushing in the same general direction to discern the best ways of expressing humanity's natural knowledge of God.

Second, there is an intriguing possibility of taking something like Schleiermacher's idea of a human "feeling of dependence" and exploring its potential interface with someone like Aquinas on natural knowledge or John Calvin on the *sensus divinitatis*. Sutanto is in a much better position than I am to articulate how Bavinck envisioned figures like Schleiermacher and Calvin complementing one another on this particular topic. I will limit myself, then, to pointing out some clarifications that, in my view, need to be borne in mind in order to assess the potential benefits of appropriating the work of a figure like Schleiermacher in this way.

Among other things, it is worth noting that in Aquinas and the Reformed orthodox, there is already an affirmation that human beings have a natural knowledge of God that precedes scientific reasoning about God or the formation of a system of natural theology. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.38, for example, Aquinas states that human beings "immediately" (*statim*) come to a common knowledge of God. For human beings "see" the course of natural things and "perceive" that someone has ordered these things. In the *Summa Theologiae*, IIa.IIae.85.1, Aquinas addresses why human beings have offered sacrifices to God. He writes that natural reason (i.e. the natural power of understanding, not necessarily a process of scientific reasoning) dictates to human beings that they are subject to someone greater than themselves. This takes place "on account of defects, which [man] senses in himself, in which he needs to be helped and directed by some superior." The Reformed orthodox often make the point that there is an "implanted" natural knowledge of God prior to any "acquired" natural knowledge of God that comes from ratiocination. The "implanted" knowledge is "implanted" in the sense that it arises spontaneously from human contact with the world and the divine law written on the human heart, without any need of ratiocination.¹ To be clear, these earlier statements need not prevent us from drawing upon more recent authors who emphasize the pre-scientific character of our natural knowledge of God. Indeed, these statements might provide a positive impetus for doing just that. But even if the appropriation of something like Schleiermacher's "feeling of dependence" yields something new in that the awareness would somehow precede cognitive activity altogether, the presence of the implanted-acquired distinction in older theological works shows at least that the notion of a natural awareness that precedes scientific reasoning is not new.

1. See, for example, Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae*, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Geneva, 1688), I.3.2; John Owen, *Theologoumena pantodapa*, in vol. 17 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), I.5.2, 6; Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, 2nd ed. (Utrecht, 1724), II.2.18.

On the question of an awareness or consciousness of God that might precede cognitive activity altogether, I have to reflect more on the sense in which Bavinck and Sutanto take consciousness or the feeling of dependence to be something “underneath” the human intellect. On one hand, I find Bavinck’s statements quoted from *The Wonderful Works of God* and *The Philosophy of Revelation* to be arresting in a helpful way, indicating something important that takes place in the human person and makes us aware that we are not alone and are, in fact, dependent upon the God who gives us life. On the other hand, it would be good to have more clarity on whether or in what sense the *sensus divinitatis* or the feeling of dependence is supposed to precede cognitive activity or thought. Certainly, one can say that the sense of divinity precedes ratiocination, but according to someone like Calvin, it does not precede cognition altogether. Calvin is clear in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I.3.1; I.5.1) that the sense of divinity is located in the mind. It is an awareness of certain “marks” of God’s glory in creation, according to which every time we open our eyes we are “constrained to see him.” This fits with the apostle Paul’s teaching that from the created order human beings *understand* God’s eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1:20). It seems crucial at this point to avoid confusing “pre-scientific” with “pre-cognitive.” While sense perception, intuition, or the *sensus divinitatis*, in particular, are not outcomes of discursive thought, they are still instances of cognition. In traditional language, they are instances of *notitia*: basic awareness or apprehension of something that requires no ratiocination.

A related issue is whether the *sensus divinitatis* should be regarded as primarily affective. At a semantic and perhaps pedantic level, the Latin *sensus* belongs in the domain of cognition more than volition. When these words are translated by the English word “feeling,” this can be somewhat obscured because our use of the word “feeling” can signify not just perception or awareness but also affection or emotion. There is of course an affective knowledge that involves or induces love of what is known, but that love still presupposes some intellectual apprehension of an object. If human beings cannot desire something of which they have no knowledge, then positing an affective component in our natural awareness of God arguably underscores the need to affirm its cognitive character as well.

Finally, I appreciate Sutanto’s interaction with Augustine and Bonaventure on illumination because it presses us to think carefully about how God acts within our minds to produce knowledge of ordinary things and of Himself. Sutanto aptly describes how Bonaventure views God as the first thing known by the human subject without allowing this to collapse into a Platonic account of innate knowledge. I cannot do justice to the complexity of this topic at the moment, but I think there are three main points at which one might compare

and contrast Bonaventure's doctrine of illumination and the broadly Thomistic view articulated in *God in Himself*.

First, Bonaventure emphasizes that every instance of human knowledge requires an inward operation of God or an influence of the eternal Logos, and I think that this is compatible with Aquinas' teaching that God not only institutes created natures and virtues but also providentially moves and directs the acts of the human intellect in order to provide natural knowledge (*Super Boetium De trinitate*, 1.1).

Second, as Sutanto observes, Bonaventure is prepared to say that God is the first thing known by the human intellect. According to Bonaventure, human scientific knowledge in particular must have recourse to the immutable truth and rationality of the eternal Logos. Created things are understood in light of the eternal knowledge and plan of the Logos who is the *ratio* of all things.² Yet, Bonaventure also affirms that sense perception and the introduction of phantasms in the intellect are the beginning of human knowledge.³ For Aquinas, God is the "principle of cognition" in whom we understand things in the sense that things are made knowable to us by God, like things are made visible to us by the sun (*Summa theol.*, Ia.84.5). Because sensible things are the first objects of our knowledge, and because it is possible to know things without yet knowing the divine source of our ability to know, God is not the first thing known (*Super De trin.*, 1.1). The difference could be only semantic, but if sense perception is what generates knowledge in us and if having knowledge by God's light does not first require a direct knowledge or consideration of that light itself, then, in my view, Aquinas' account is more precise at this point.

Third, Bonaventure reasons that God's work of illumination takes place somewhere between the categories of the natural government of all creatures and the infusion of supernatural grace in the saints.⁴ By contrast, the approach outlined in *God in Himself* does not posit a third category between nature and supernatural grace. My sense is that instead of introducing a third category, it may be fitting to open up the category of nature and specify that within that category there are different ways in which God works through ordinary creaturely powers and processes, including the case of guiding human beings to obtain knowledge. Perhaps, Sutanto might provide a counterargument for

2. See, for example, Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, in vol. 2 of *Doctoris seraphici S. Bonaventurae opera omnia* (Florence: ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1885), II.17.1.1 ad 6; Bonaventure, "Sermo IV, Christus unus omnium magister," in *Sermones selecti de rebus theologiacis*, in vol. 5 of *Opera omnia* (Florence: ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1891), 6-10, 18.

3. Bonaventure, "Christus unus omnium magister," 18-19.

4. Bonaventure, "Christus unum omnium magister," 16-17; *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi*, in vol. 5 of *Opera omnia*, IV corp.

developing that third category. In any event, I am grateful to Sutanto for connecting the argument of *God in Himself* with Bonaventure and hope to reflect more on Bonaventure's potential contributions to a theological understanding of human knowledge.

Response to Scott Swain

Scott Swain notes that a number of recent theologians have argued that a consistently Protestant account of God ought to avoid "metaphysics" and instead describe God only on the basis of God's works of supernatural grace. Swain sympathizes with my interest in offering a critique of that idea and observes that I have laid out several reasons for retaining the use of traditional metaphysical concepts in Christian theology. One of those reasons—namely, that Scripture itself utilizes certain patterns of speech that overlap with patterns of speech found in classical metaphysics—is of special relevance in Swain's argument. Indeed, he adds to some scriptural examples that I have given by calling attention to Pauline teaching on God's immortality and to the use of what some have called "prepositional metaphysics," which is a way of describing divine causality by employing prepositions like "from," "through," and "to" (see esp. Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6).

By examining the apostle Paul's cross-cultural message in Acts 17, in particular, Swain sheds light on how "the gospel's subversive fulfillment of pagan philosophy and religion" supplies "the evangelical logic" needed for critical appropriation of metaphysical resources. According to Swain, the gospel not only fulfills the Scriptures of Israel but also "the Greco-Roman philosophical and religious quest to ground religion in a proper understanding of the divine nature." In this respect, Swain argues, drawing upon metaphysical discourse is not only fitting and expedient in Christian theology but even necessary. Here I will make two comments in response to Swain's line of argument.

First, Swain has insightfully shown how the apostle Paul's teaching positively links up with a Greek philosophical aspiration to make sure that religious practice aligns with who and what God actually is. It is worth highlighting the significance of Swain's claim: Christian theology's work of distinguishing God from finite being is not something reducible to a purely human "ontotheology." It does not come down to purely human preferences about divine majesty or sovereignty. Instead, though the work of showing the distinction between God and finite being no doubt can go astray, this work in Christian theology is informed and driven by the teaching of the Bible itself. Moreover, as Swain notes, the modes of reasoning about God that one finds in the Bible are to some degree commensurable with the modes of reasoning that one finds in philosophical discourse. This is good news for those who proclaim the good

news of Christ. There are points of intellectual common ground with those who are not believers in Christ. The Spirit does not wholly bypass the human intellect of those who hear the gospel but works through the cognitive content communicated to them in order to incite faith in the God of the Bible.

Alongside Swain's discussion of Paul's message in Acts 17 I would place Paul's message in Acts 14, where Paul has to combat idolatry in Lystra. When the crowd there begins to exalt Paul and Barnabas as deities, part of Paul's response is to clarify that he and Barnabas are *homoioipatheis* with their listeners, "of like passions" or "affected in similar ways" (Acts 14:15). For Paul, passion or being affected by infirmities distinguishes human beings from the true God. And if the hearers of the gospel message are tempted to regard as divine something subject to passion, then faithfulness to the apostolic mission requires clarifying that the deity of the true God who alone is worthy of worship is above human passion. As in the case of Acts 17, Paul's message in Acts 14 shows that such a view of God does not impede the proclamation of the kindness of God or the incarnation of the Son of God. For Paul adds that the God above passion has provided a testimony to himself by giving the people rain, food, and gladness in their hearts (Acts 14:16-17). When Paul and Barnabas return to Lystra later in the chapter, they commit the believers to the Lord in whom they believed, which in Acts would naturally be taken as the incarnate, crucified, risen Messiah (Acts 14:23). In the book of Acts, the God who is above human passion, and who should be known as such for evangelistic purposes, is also the God who bought the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). A Christian account of God, then, will have to do the work of distinguishing God from created being, a work that is sometimes called "metaphysical." This work is intrinsic to the apostolic mission and need not hinder proclamation of the Son's incarnation and human passion.

We can go a step further and note that biblical religion requires setting forth the distinction between God and finite being even apart from its encounter with Greco-Roman religion and philosophy. Isaiah's prophecy, for example, powerfully reveals the otherness of the true God. He has measured the dust of the earth, but His Spirit can never be measured (40:12-13). He receives counsel from no one (40:14). He is not like anyone (40:18, 25), which means not that creatures do not exhibit God's majesty but that there is no one whose majesty God exhibits. For God alone is the fount of all wisdom and power. This turns out to have a profound religious significance, because those who trust the true God may be confident that he sees their plight and will deliver them (40:27-31).

My aim in mentioning Isaiah's teaching about God is to add to Swain's description of the need for aligning faith and worship with what God is really

like. The necessity of thinking carefully about God's distinction from creatures emerges primarily from within the logic of biblical faith itself and secondarily from an external encounter with the proclivities of certain Greek philosophies. Of course, we could add that the necessity of distinguishing God from finite being emerges from natural revelation also and, most fundamentally, from the very being of the infinite God. But the point is that a Christian account of God is poised to fulfill the best insights of Greco-Roman philosophy because, on the basis of supernatural and natural revelation, it is already alert to the need for distinguishing God from finite being and did not first learn of that need from one of the systems of Greco-Roman philosophy.

Second, I would like to add to Swain's argument that the use of metaphysical discourse is necessary in Christian theology by suggesting that what we often call "metaphysical" concepts or distinctions are not something detached from ordinary human thought or speech. They do not belong to a select few philosophers in ancient Greece. Rather, the concepts and distinctions taken up in the scientific discipline of metaphysics are actually just ordinary features of human thought that correspond to the structures of God's world. The particular discursive refinements of those concepts and distinctions that one finds in the discipline of metaphysics are undertaken by few people, but the rudimentary content of those concepts and distinctions is generated by ordinary human experience in God's world. One mundane example might be the law of non-contradiction. Relatively few human beings will have read rigorous philosophical discussions of the law of non-contradiction. At the same time, a person who has had little formal education and has perhaps faced poverty throughout their life will intuitively grasp that he or she cannot lack adequate food and water and, in the same way and at the same time, not lack adequate food and water. Going beyond the law of non-contradiction, another example could be the distinction between substance and accidents. Again, relatively few human beings will have read rigorous philosophical discussions of this topic. At the same time, a person with little formal education will intuitively grasp that there is a distinction between something that does not have to inhere in something else in order to exist (e.g. a human being) and something that does have to inhere in something else in order to exist and is not included in what that other thing fundamentally is (e.g. the color of a human being's hair). If the proper work of metaphysics is simply to illumine and unpack what the average person already knows about certain aspects of life in God's world, perhaps it ought not to feel so threatening to use metaphysical concepts in the work of scriptural exegesis and Christian theology.

Moreover, using concepts taken up and analyzed in the discipline of metaphysics may be unavoidable. One illustration of this can be found in Richard

Bauckham's work in Christology. In his excellent book *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Bauckham endeavors to avoid what he calls "metaphysical" concepts like "essence" or "substance" and favors the term "identity" to describe Jesus' relation to the God of Israel.⁵ I find Bauckham's work to be incisive and beneficial, but it has to be said that the concept of identity is actually discussed in detail throughout the classical metaphysical tradition. In particular, metaphysicians typically analyze what identity entails in contrast with "diversity" or "distinction."⁶ This does not undermine Bauckham's work at all, but it does illustrate that even deliberate attempts to avoid metaphysical language in Christian theology will face serious difficulties. More examples and clarifications could be offered, but it seems appropriate to me to acknowledge, in accordance with Swain's arguments, that the use of metaphysical concepts ends up being not only expedient but even necessary in Christian theology.

Response to Dolf te Velde

Dolf te Velde's interaction with the book concentrates on the issue of analogy and univocity. Already aware of his appreciation of the work of John Duns Scotus, I expected nothing less and am glad he turned his attention to this complex topic. I am also thankful that te Velde saw in my treatment of the topic a "generous Thomism" that, I had hoped, would not needlessly alienate readers of a more Scotist persuasion. His reflection on what the doctrine of analogy is for and what it might gain from incorporating some of Scotus' teaching should be welcomed by anyone interested in affirming both the truthfulness and the limitations of our speech about God. My response will be outlined in three main points.

First, I agree with te Velde that there are serious problems in the works of certain noteworthy writers on analogy and univocity. He recounts Henry of Ghent's view that predicating a perfection of God and creatures involves two distinct concepts (one for the divine version of the perfection and one for the created version) whose unity rests on a temporary mental confusion of the two concepts. This rather weak understanding of conceptual unity immediately raises questions about whether Henry's view could secure the intelligibility

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5. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), ix-x, 6-8, 30-1, 35, 52.
 6. See, for example, Aristotle, *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, ed. W. Jaeger (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), IV, 1017b-1018b; John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, in vol. 1 of *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), fus. λη' and μθ'; Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. M.-R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1950), V.11-12, nn. 906-935.

and the veracity of theological speech. It is not surprising that Henry's account elicited a strong response from Scotus. From a different angle, Cajetan's use of the analogy of proper proportion or proportionality also seems inadequate to me.⁷ This kind of analogy, where A is to B as C is to D, appears to leave unspecified whether or in what sense A might be like C or B might be like D. In response to te Velde's concern about the inadequacy of this analogy in the doctrine of God, I would highlight that in *God in Himself* I did very little with it and instead prioritized the analogy of attribution, particularly the kind of analogy of attribution in which one thing (i.e. the creature) participates in and receives what it has from another (i.e. God). The prioritization of this kind of analogy of attribution presses us to recognize that creaturely perfections are ontologically similar to God's perfections. It also invites us to specify how the sense in which an attribute is applied to creatures is similar to and diverse from the sense in which it is applied to God. In other words, it holds our theological speech accountable to reality by compelling us to connect its sense to the way things actually are.

Second, te Velde explores how Scotus might help us better grasp what is common to the sense in which a concept applies to a creature and the sense in which it applies to God. Finding some unity or commonality here is vital to maintaining that the application of our concepts and words to God (e.g. being, wisdom, goodness) is meaningful and truthful. Otherwise, after deriving our understanding of being, wisdom, or goodness from creatures, we would attempt to project those terms onto God without knowing the sense in which they might (or might not) apply to God. For Scotus, the conceptual unity or commonality here is grounded in a univocal concept of being, for example, which, on a semantic level, applies equally to creatures and to God.⁸ More specifically, in Scotus' view, it is possible to move from the concept of finite being or infinite being and arrive at a concept of being in and of itself (*ex se*), with a formal *ratio* or definition abstracted from finitude and infinity and thus applicable equally to creatures and to God.⁹ It is that equal applicability of the concept that constitutes univocity.

7. In fairness to Cajetan, I should mention that some have argued that his purported development of Aquinas' thinking has been misunderstood. See Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Reading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

8. This pertains only to semantics and not to ontology, for Scotus recognizes that in reality being does not apply equally to creatures and to God (see Scotus' *Ordinatio*, in vol. 4 of *Opera omnia*, ed. P. Carolo Balić [Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1956], I.8.1.3, nn. 82, 142).

9. *Ordinatio*, in vol. 3 of *Opera omnia*, ed. P. Carolo Balić (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1954), I.3.1.1, nn. 27-29, 39-40.

I think te Velde is right that Scotus may not be too far from what Aquinas intends in his doctrine of analogy. If that is the case, there need not be war between “Scotists” and “Thomists” on this matter. At the same time, I will try to state what Aquinas does differently and why I think it is sufficient for securing the intelligibility and veracity of our speech about God.

Perhaps, it is more accurate to say that it is what Aquinas does *not* do that makes him different. Whereas Scotus affirms the possibility of isolating the concept of being, for example, from the diverse and unequal ways in which concrete beings exist, Aquinas does not do this. Aquinas can distinguish between the perfection signified by a concept or name and the mode in which the perfection is present in something (i.e. in the creature or in God; for example, *Summa theol.*, Ia.13.3 ad 1), but he does not posit an underlying concept of the perfection whose *ratio* is fully detached from the diverse modes in which the perfection is actually in things. The aspect of the *ratio* that concerns what the perfection is will not be separated from the aspect of the *ratio* that concerns how the perfection is present in something. Because the two aspects of the *ratio* are always joined together, and because the second aspect regarding the mode is diverse in creatures and in God, our most basic concept of something like being, wisdom, or goodness always involves diverse *rationes* and is therefore analogical. Even when one is not actively deploying the concept to think or speak about creatures or God, the concept still contains an awareness that it is unequally applicable to dependent, finite creatures, and to the absolute, infinite God.¹⁰ The concept never truly recedes to a point of equal applicability or univocity. Given that being (or wisdom or goodness, for example) is not a genus that, by nature, applies equally to many, I think it is prudent to maintain that such a concept does always contain an awareness of its unequal applicability.

At the same time, even if the aforementioned aspects of the *ratio* of a perfection are never separated, there is still a ground for the intelligibility and veracity of our speech about God. The aspect of the *ratio* that concerns what a concept like being, wisdom, or goodness ordinarily signifies is held in place when the concept is applied to God. In the case of the concept of being, for example, the *ratio* still includes “that which is.” Or, in the case of wisdom, the *ratio* still includes “knowledge of higher things in light of which lower things are understood.” If that familiar aspect of the *ratio* that concerns what the

10. This comment is different from Francisco Suárez’s contention that the concept of *ens* may be only *potentially* ordered to the things that fall under it (i.e. creatures and God) (see his treatment in *Disputationes metaphysicae*, in vol. 26 of *Opera omnia* [Paris: Vivès, 1861], II.28.3). I am suggesting that even if one considers habitual knowledge of being (or wisdom or goodness, for example), the concept is still *intrinsically* ordered to the diverse ways in which the thing signified is present in reality.

concept of the perfection ordinarily signifies remains in place when we speak about God, then we can understand the meaning of our claims about God and confirm that even if we do not comprehend God, we are still speaking truthfully about Him. Put differently, if we do not jettison the common aspect of the *ratio* or assume that its integrity or intelligibility must be compromised by its union with the diverse aspect of the *ratio* that concerns the mode (either dependent and finite or absolute and infinite), then we are positioned to speak truthfully about God and even to reason about His perfections.¹¹

Third, te Velde invites us to reflect on the benefits of using Scotus' formal distinction to describe God's simplicity. I share te Velde's interest in seeking out the best ways to express that each of the divine perfections (wisdom, goodness, love, power, and so forth) is truly present in God Himself. The thing signified by a divine attribute is ultimately not a mental concept that we possess but rather the being of God Himself. This is something in which Aquinas also took an interest. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, for example, Aquinas emphasizes that the *ratio* of a given divine attribute (i.e. what the intellect apprehends about God) exists not just in our minds or even in God's outward effects but also in God Himself. But, according to Aquinas, the multiplicity itself of the *rationes* is still located in our minds rather than in God Himself (*Super Sent.*, I.2.1.2-3). One might add, with various Reformed orthodox writers, that the multiplicity of the *rationes* is found also in the operations and works of God that exhibit his perfection.¹² In this approach, what the diverse *rationes* of the attributes signify is always present in God, but the diversity itself of the *rationes* is not found in God Himself but rather in His outward works and, consequently, in our understanding of God.

Of course, Scotus famously posited formal distinctions among divine attributes like wisdom and goodness.¹³ Medieval interpreters took different

11. Space does not permit further discussion here, but I do not think that univocity is required for wisdom or goodness, for example, to serve as a middle term in reasoning about God's attributes. For example, the diversity of the mode in which goodness is present in the creature and in God does not derail reasoning from the goodness of a created effect to the conclusion that God is good, even if one would still clarify that God's goodness is infinite and really identical to his own essence.

12. For example, Johann Alsted, *Metaphysica* (Herbornae Nassoviorum, 1613), I.29; Maastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, II.6.23.

13. For Scotus on the formal distinction in theology proper, see *Ordinatio*, I.8.1.4 esp. nn. 191-222; *The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture – Reportatio I-A*, vol. 2, trans. Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Publications, 2004), I.33; *Quaestio de formalitatibus, quae dicitur "Logica Scoti,"* in Kent Emery Jr and Garrett R. Smith, "The *Quaestio de formalitatibus* by John Duns Scotus, Sometimes Called the *Logica Scoti*," *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 56 (2014): 153-182. Since a formal distinction concerns the nature and definition of something, it is also called a distinction *ex natura rei*.

positions on whether Scotus' formal distinction concerned the divine attributes only in human apprehension of God or also in God's own being and actuality.¹⁴ In Scotus' Parisian disputation on the question of "formalities," which seems to represent his most developed thinking on the subject, Scotus does affirm that one can be formally distinct from another even in act (*etsi habeat actualitatem plenam*) without this entailing absolute non-identity or calling into question the simplicity of the being in which they are present.¹⁵ Here Scotus refers to the distinctive *ratio* of essence, goodness, and justice in God.¹⁶ It appears, then, that Scotus does posit or at least allow formal distinctions among the essence and attributes of God not just in our apprehension of God or in God's power to produce diverse outward effects but also in God's own actuality.

If Scotus' work on the formal distinction does posit or at least allow such formal distinctions in God, how might this be addressed in constructive theology today? Assuming one is committed to maintaining that God is simple, I think there are at least two important questions to consider. First, would formal distinctions in God's own act of being ultimately require a real distinction as well (i.e. a distinction between one thing and another thing) that would conflict with God's simplicity? While Scotus held that such formal distinctions do not require a real distinction, I am not so sure and think it would be beneficial to see more work done on this point.¹⁷

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14. See the examples provided in Stephen D. Dumont, "Duns Scotus's Parisian Question on the Formal Distinction," *Vivarium*, 43(2005): 7-62. In Reformed scholastic thought, Turretin, for example, takes the formal distinction to concern only human conception of God, so, for Turretin, it is actually too weak a distinction to employ by itself in theology proper (*Institutio theologiae elencticae*, III.5.9). Other accounts of Scotus on the formal distinction and on divine simplicity can be found in Marilyn McCord Adams, "Ockham on Identity and Distinction," *Franciscan Studies*, 36, 1976, 5-74; Richard Cross, "Scotus's Parisian Teaching on Divine Simplicity," in Olivier Bulnois (ed.), *Duns Scot à Paris, 1302-2002: Actes du colloque de Paris, 2-4 septembre 2002* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 519-562 and *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), chap. 6 and 235-240; G. Menching, "Bemerkungen zu den scotistischen Neologismen am Beispiel der *formalitas*," in J. Hamesse and C. Steel, eds., *L'élaboration du vocabulaire philosophique au Moyen Age: Actes du Colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve et Leuven, 12-14 septembre 1998* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 357-368; Jeff Steele and Thomas Williams, "Complexity without Composition: Duns Scotus on Divine Simplicity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 93, 2019, 611-631. The claim of Steele and Williams that Scotus effectively discarded divine simplicity seems overstated to me, but that is an issue to be discussed another time.
15. The exception would be a case where the one automatically conflicts with the other, which does not apply in a case like wisdom and goodness, for example.
16. Scotus, *De formalitatibus*, 163-164, 176-177.
17. Among the early Reformed recipients of Thomist and Scotist material on divine simplicity, Johann Alsted, for example, contends that a formal distinction in act requires multiple actual infinities and runs aground on the same arguments raised against real distinctions in God (*Theologia naturalis* [Frankfurt, 1615], I.4, 38, 44).

Second, are formal distinctions in God's own act of being necessary to confirm that the divine attributes set forth not merely our conceptions of God but also what is included in God's own being? There are two reasons why it seems to me that such formal distinctions in act are not necessary. First, the diverse divine attributes have an extramental basis in the outward effects of God, which have diverse features expressive of what is included in the being of their divine cause (e.g. wisdom, mercy, justice, power). Second, with regard to created agency, effects with diverse features are often expressive of diverse qualities with diverse formal *rationes* in the acting subject. But this does not entail that, in God's case, His diverse effects presuppose formally distinct attributes in God's own being. The diverse character of God's effects may be reflective of what is, in God's own being, a formally singular perfection. What could be produced only by multiple forms in finite agents could be produced by the one form of God's rich, eminent perfection. The analogy has limitations, but Aquinas and various Reformed orthodox figures sometimes illustrate this point by referring to the example of the sun's light. Many effects are produced by the sun's light, but their formal diversity is not present in the sun's light itself. What is formally diverse in the effects is present in a preeminent, singular way in the sun's light.¹⁸ Voetius also uses the illustration of the soul. What sustains basic vegetative functioning without consciousness in plants is one form. What animates and enables sensation in non-rational animals is another form. But, in the higher case of human beings, the one rational soul or form that enables rational thought and volition also enables sensation and basic bodily functioning.¹⁹ In short, those which are formally distinct in lower things may be formally one in higher things. Accordingly, while I would not assert that Scotus' view must conflict with God's simplicity, I am also not quite persuaded that formal distinctions in God's own act of being are needed to confirm that what the divine attributes set forth is present in God Himself.

Conclusion

Each of these respondents to *God in Himself* has written an illuminating and thought-provoking reflection that has enriched my thinking on the various subjects they have taken up. I trust the same will be true for others who are considering these topics as well. The quality of this engagement on what it means to know and love the triune God in Himself reinforces the importance

18. For example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia.4.2; Girolamo Zanchi, *De natura Dei* (Neostadii Palatinorum, 1598), I.8, 18-19; Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum disputationum theologicarum, pars prima* (Utrecht, 1648), I.13, 233-234.

19. Voetius, *Selectarum disputationum*, I.13, 234.

of walking this path in fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ, with whom we will one day see the Lord face-to-face.

Author biography

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