

Aquinas, Analogy and the Trinity

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I argue that Aquinas' account of analogy provides resources for resolving the prima facie conflict between his claims that (1) the divine relations constituting the persons are "one and the same" with the divine essence; (2) the divine persons are really distinct, (3) the divine essence is absolutely simple. Specifically, I argue that Aquinas adopts an analogical understanding of the concepts of being and unity, and that these concepts are implicit in his formulation of claims about substance and relation in the Trinity. I then show how Aquinas appeals to key structural features of analogical concepts, notably, the *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization, to resolve apparent conflicts between the unity of substance and distinction of relations in the Trinity.

KEYWORDS: Aquinas, Trinity, semantics, unity, being, analogy, coherence, real distinction, metaphysics, medieval theology

1. Introduction

Aquinas provides little by way of explicit guidance in resolving tensions which emerge between the following claims in his account of the Trinity:¹

¹ My citations of Aquinas' works employ the following abbreviations:

<i>DV</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de veritate</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de potentia</i>
<i>In Meta.</i>	<i>In duodecim libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio</i>
<i>In Sent.</i>	<i>Scriptum super libros sententiarum</i>
<i>Quodl.</i>	<i>Quaestiones de quolibet</i>
<i>SCG</i>	<i>Summa contra gentiles</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa theologiae</i>

All translations are mine, although I have consulted other English translations, adopting or changing their wording freely (see bibliography for details of the relevant editions and translations).

1. The divine relations, which constitute the persons, are ‘one and the same’ (*unum et idem*) with the divine essence;²
2. There are real distinctions between the Trinitarian relations, constituting the distinctions between the divine persons;³
3. The divine essence is absolutely simple.⁴

These claims have been regarded by a number of commentators as something of an aporetic cluster,⁵ thereby raising questions about the overall coherence of Aquinas’ Trinitarian theology. In what follows, I will call (1)-(3) the *Trinity claims* and the challenge of providing a jointly consistent reading of the Trinity claims *the problem of coherence*.

In his discussions of the Trinity claims, Aquinas surprisingly seems to give little attention to the problem of coherence. For instance, commenting on Aquinas’ discussion in *Summa Theologiae* I.3.28, Karen Kilby writes:

[Aquinas] has laid things out in such a way as to make a problem more or less leap off the page at us – how can two things be absolutely identical with a third, and yet not identical with each other? – but he seems hardly to think it worth commenting on.⁶

² *ST* I.28.2.

³ *ST* I.28.3.

⁴ *ST* I.3.7.

⁵ I take an aporetic cluster to be “a set of individually plausible propositions which is collectively inconsistent” (Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: Open Court, 2001], 5). For discussion of the Trinity claims with reference to the problem of coherence, cf. Christopher Hughes, *On A Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 153–66; James E. Dolezal, “Trinity, Simplicity and the Status of God’s Personal Relations,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014), 79–98; R.T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 184n87.

⁶ Karen Kilby, “Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 422.

While there is no shortage of studies on Aquinas' Trinitarian thought, many have neglected the problem of coherence.⁷ One notable exception is Peter Geach's controversial reading of Aquinas as relative identity theorist, which has given rise to its own share of exegetical and philosophical difficulties.⁸

This paper takes an alternative route for examining the problem of coherence in Aquinas' Trinity claims. I argue that Aquinas' semantics of analogy provides important conceptual background which, properly understood, dissolves the problem of coherence. Of particular note is Aquinas' analogical account of the concept of unity, and his claim that analogy, strictly speaking, is a form of non-univocity.⁹ It is well-known that Aquinas' analogical semantics has far-reaching implications for his understanding of theological language.¹⁰ However, scholarship has focused almost exclusively on *extra-Trinitarian* contexts of analogical predication, such as the analogy of *being* as used of God and of creatures.¹¹

⁷ The problem of coherence is not treated in a number of recent studies of Aquinas' thought; cf. Gilles Emery, "The Threeness and Oneness of God in Twelfth- to Fourteenth-Century Scholasticism," *Nova et Vetera* 1 (August 2003), 43–74; *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Timothy L. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

⁸ Geach's reading has sparked controversy, partly due to the difficulties involved in making sense of Aquinas' claims about identity, on the one hand, and the generally peripheral nature of those claims, on the other. Peter T. Geach, "Aquinas," in *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), 118. For discussion, cf. Daniel Molto, "The Logical Problem of the Trinity and the Strong Theory of Relative Identity," *Sophia* 56 (2017), 227–45. For readings of Aquinas as absolute identity theorist, cf. Hughes, *On A Complex Theory of a Simple God*; Robert C. Koons, "Divine Persons as Relational Qu-Objects," *Religious Studies* 2 (2018), 1–21.

⁹ Note: in what follows, I will use italics to indicate propositions and/or concepts unless context dictates otherwise.

¹⁰ Cf. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology*; Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

¹¹ For instance, Gilles Emery discusses the analogical nature of the proper names 'Father,' 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' only as used of God and of creatures (*The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 151–268); Anselm Min likewise discusses the analogy of *being* with regard to the Aristotelian categories as applied to God (Anselm K. Min, "God as the Mystery of Sharing and Shared Love: Thomas Aquinas on the Trinity," in Peter Phan [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 90); Rudi Te Velde discusses analogy only as regards the way 'person' is

By contrast, analogical predication in *intra-Trinitarian* contexts, such as the analogy of *one* as said of a divine relation and of the divine essence, has received virtually no attention.¹² Admittedly, Aquinas nowhere explicitly invokes the word ‘analogy’ in the context of discussions about the persons of the Trinity in relation to the divine essence. A key task of this paper, then, will be to make a case for the implicit presence of Aquinas’ analogical conception of *unity* in his articulation of the Trinity claims. I will do so by considering the way that an analogical understanding of *unity* not only dissolves the problem of coherence but sheds light on key texts concerning the nature of distinction and unity in the Trinity.

The discussion that follows is divided into two sections. Since my aim is to identify analogical unity and distinction in the Trinity, I begin in the first section by discussing the conceptual background of Aquinas’ understanding of unity. This will consist in a selective overview of Aquinas’ broader analogical semantics, and his account of being. After characterizing Aquinas’ understanding of unity against this background, I offer, in the following section, a reconstruction of Aquinas’ Trinity claims. I say ‘reconstruction’ because, given the focus of this paper, I will follow some aspects of Aquinas’ understanding of the Trinity claims much more closely than others. While I take the resulting picture to be very much Aquinas’ own, the focus is more or less exclusively on questions concerning the coherence of unity and distinction in the Trinity. Accordingly, I give little attention to related issues, such as the ontological implications of Aquinas’ account of the divine persons, or the overall plausibility of Aquinas’ Trinity

used of God and creatures (Rudi A. Te Velde, “The Divine Person[s]: Trinity, Person, and Analogous Naming,” in Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering [eds.], *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* [Oxford University Press, 2012], 1–14). James Dolezal mentions analogy only as regards the claim that “we predicate ‘person’ and ‘relation’ univocally of God and humans” (Dolezal, “Trinity, Simplicity and the Status of God’s Personal Relations,” 88).

¹² The only recent discussion I have been able to find regarding *intra-Trinitarian* analogy in Aquinas’ Trinitarian thought is a footnote in Jeffrey E. Brower, *Aquinas’s Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53n70.

claims.¹³ My principal argument is that, given Aquinas' account of analogical unity, the problem of coherence as it is usually formulated simply does not arise. Of course, this does not rule out other threats to coherence which are internal to Aquinas' analogical understanding of unity and distinction. I suggest that a *prima facie* conflict still arises between Aquinas' strong doctrine of divine simplicity and his claim that in God there are relational distinctions which constitute real distinctions. In the second section of this paper, I argue that Aquinas' analogical account of concepts such as *real distinction* allows for a resolution of these further difficulties.

Some of the observations that follow, especially in regard to the general outlines of Aquinas' analogical semantics and his account of unity, are well known and have been offered previously by other commentators. The contribution of this paper is to explore neglected consequences of Aquinas' account of analogy, and to provide a deeper reading of key texts concerning the coherence of Aquinas' Trinitarian theology.

Issues of coherence remain at the fore of contemporary analytic Trinitarian theology. However, while contemporary analytic theologians and philosophers of religion have developed a wide range of metaphysical models to account for the coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity, questions of analogical semantics in a Trinitarian context have been relatively neglected.¹⁴ While the task of engaging Aquinas with contemporary analytic debates is one that lies outside the scope of this paper, the present argument can nevertheless be seen

¹³ This paper does not evaluate the philosophical or semantic plausibility of Aquinas' views on analogy, nor does it evaluate the philosophical costs and benefits of analogical accounts of specific concepts such as *being* as found in Aquinas' Trinitarian theology. For recent critical discussion of Aquinas' analogical account of *being*, cf. Kris McDaniel, *The Fragmentation of Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20–21; Christopher Hughes, *Aquinas on Being, Goodness, and God* (London: Routledge, 2015), 14–20. For argument to the effect that Aquinas' account of identity is ill-formed, cf. Richard Cross, "Resemblance and Identity," in Christophe Erismann (ed.), *On What There Was: Conceptions of Being 500-1650, East and West*, vol. 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

¹⁴ This point is echoed by Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World*, 53n70.

as making a first foray into the relatively unexplored waters of Trinitarian analogical semantics.

2. The analogy of *unity*

Given that Aquinas defines *unity* in terms of *being*, and in turn characterizes *being* within a broader theory of analogical concepts, it will be useful to begin my discussion of Aquinas' understanding of unity with an overview of this broader analogical framework, followed by Aquinas' understanding of *being*.¹⁵

a) *Analogical naming*

Aquinas uses the term 'analogy' in a variety of contexts for varying purposes.¹⁶ Here, I will not focus on Aquinas' discussions of "analogy" as referring to metaphysical phenomena. Rather, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on Aquinas' understanding of analogy as a conceptual phenomenon describing the relationship between any two (or more) concepts which are partially the same

¹⁵ Aquinas often draws a distinction between two meanings of unity, that which serves as "principle of number," associated with the category of quantity, thus applying only to material, quantitatively measurable things, and that "which is convertible with being," which is applicable to God (*ST* I.11.3 ad 2; I.11.2 corpus). Since the Trinity claims are concerned with immaterial divine persons, the discussion of unity in this paper will be concerned with the latter notion of unity.

¹⁶ Senses of 'analogy' which do not feature in this the argument of this paper include analogy understood as the metaphysical phenomenon of proportional likeness (cf. Joshua P. Hochschild, "Aquinas's Two Concepts of Analogy and a Complex Semantics for Naming the Simple God," *The Thomist* 83 [2019], 155–84), subdivisions of linguistic analogy into the models *plurius ad unum*, *unius ad alterum*, etc. (cf. E.J. Ashworth, "Analogy and Equivocation in Thirteenth-Century Logic: Aquinas in Context," *Mediaeval Studies* 54 [1992], 94–135; "Medieval Theories of Analogy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [2017] <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/analogy-medieval/>>, and analogy as a phenomenon extending to judgments as well as concepts (cf. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 154–95).

in meaning.¹⁷ What is it to be partially the same in meaning? To answer this, it will be helpful to begin by clarifying terminology, in particular, Aquinas' threefold categorization of terms, or words, into univocal, equivocal and analogical.¹⁸ In one place, Aquinas describes analogical terms as intermediate between the other two:

In univocals one name is predicated of diverse things with completely the same meaning [...] In equivocals however, the same name is predicated of diverse things with an entirely different meaning [...] But in the case of those things which are spoken of in the way mentioned previously [i.e. analogically], the same name is predicated of various things with a meaning that is partly the same and partly different.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that Aquinas' threefold categorization is not of names considered absolutely, but rather, of groups of names *relative to a given context of predication*.²⁰ Thus, for instance, it is possible to categorize a name in one way with respect to a given context of predication (e.g. "bank" as said of a river bank and as said of a money bank would be equivocal), but another way with respect to another context of predication (e.g. "bank" as said of two different river banks would be univocal).²¹ Accordingly, I will take it for granted that names are analogical in a context-relative way in what follows (and will explicitly specify that context if it is unclear).

¹⁷ The background of Aquinas' account of analogy is the well-known Aristotelian 'semiotic triangle' according to which names (either word-tokens or word-types) function as signs of intellectual concepts, which in turn function as likenesses of things. Names themselves are linked to their significations, or meanings, purely conventionally: i.e. they signify things only as a result of some agent's action of associating a given utterance with ('imposing' it upon) a given thing. For Aristotle's text cf. *De Interpretatione* 16a3-6; for discussion cf. Ashworth, "Medieval Theories of Analogy."

¹⁸ For the core texts, cf. *SCG* I.34; cf. *DV* 2.11 ad 6, 21.4 ad 2, and *ST* I.13.5.

¹⁹ *In Meta.* XI.3.4.

²⁰ For a detailed Thomistic presentation of univocity, equivocality and analogy conceived as dyadic (or polyadic) relationships between pairs (or n-tuples) of homonymous word-tokens, cf. I.M. Bocheński, "On Analogy," *The Thomist* 11 [1948], 424-47.

²¹ For Aquinas' discussion of a context-sensitive case, cf. *ST* I.13.5 obj. 1 & ad 1.

It is also worth noting that Aquinas' threefold distinction between univocity, equivocity and analogy is purely linguistic in nature, identifying a features of names or word-tokens and their meanings. However, it can be extended more or less to the kinds of relationships obtaining between concepts and their conceptual contents. In this extended sense, it will be helpful to characterize univocals and equivocals as concepts which, in a given context, have exactly the same informational content, and entirely different content, respectively:²²

- (i) *Univocity*: two concepts are univocal just in case their informational content is exactly the same.
- (ii) *Equivocity*: two concepts are equivocal just in case their informational content is entirely different.

Analogical concepts can be negatively characterized as those which, in a given context, are non-univocal and non-equivocal, i.e. satisfying (iii) and (iv):

- (iii) *Non-univocity*: two concepts are non-univocal just in case their informational content is not exactly the same.
- (iv) *Non-equivocity*: two concepts are non-equivocal just in case their informational content is not entirely different.

²² By "informational content" I mean a feature or features serving to ground objective similarity. These features (whether substantial essences, proper accidents, or otherwise) need not be universals in the Platonic realist sense of extra-mentally existing universals, wholly present in multiple things; Aquinas takes them to be more akin to tropes, i.e. features existing only as particulars (cf. *In Sent.* II.17.1.1 corpus). For discussion of common natures as "distinct realizations of the same information-content," cf. Gyula Klima, "The Medieval Problem of Universals," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2017) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/universals-medieval/>>. For discussion of common natures with reference to trope theory, cf. Jeffrey E. Brower, "Aquinas on the Problem of Universals," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 92 (2015), 715–35.

Let us now consider partial sameness of meaning. It will be useful to begin, by way of contrast, with what we might call a *compositional analysis* of analogy.²³ On this view, partial sameness of meaning occurs when two complex concepts pick out different but overlapping features, with the overlapping features corresponding to an overlapping conceptual part shared by each of the two concepts. These concepts are partially different in virtue of each having some conceptual part(s) not shared by the other, and partially the same in virtue of having at least some shared conceptual part(s). The shared conceptual part(s) can be thought of as an underlying univocal concept present in each of the two analogically related concepts. On this view, for instance, “God is a being” and “Fido is a being” involve analogically different concepts of being respectively (call them *being*₁ and *being*₂) just in case they are complex concepts each with some conceptual parts not shared by the other (e.g. *infinite* as part of *being*₁ and *finite* as part of *being*₂), and at least one underlying univocal concept, *being*₃, such that *being*₃ can be truly said, univocally, of both God and Fido.²⁴

Aquinas does not advance a compositional analysis of analogy. While Aquinas does hold that one and the same underlying concept can be found in univocal terms, “just as *animal* is found in each species of animal,”²⁵ analogical predication, by contrast, does not appear to involve any such shared underlying concept, even implicitly:

²³ This view has been attributed to John Duns Scotus (cf. *Ordinatio* I.3.1; Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus: Great Medieval Thinkers* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 33–38). Scotus is sometimes described as denying outright “the semantic possibility of analogical signification” (Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan’s De Nominum Analogia* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010], 138). I take Scotus’ view to constitute a genuine account of analogy, understood as the conceptual phenomenon whereby concepts are partly the same and partly different. For another reading of analogy (attributed to Heidegger) paralleling in some respects the compositional analysis given here, cf. McDaniel, *The Fragmentation of Being*, 18–27.

²⁴ For discussion, cf. Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus and Analogy: A Brief Note,” *The Modern Schoolman* 89 (2012), 147–54.

²⁵ *ST* I.16.6 corpus.

[W]hen anything is predicated of many things analogically, it is found in only one of them according to its proper concept (*propriam rationem*), and from this one the rest are denominated. So health is predicated of animal, of urine, and of medicine, not because health exists [elsewhere] except in the animal only; but from the health of the animal, medicine is called healthy, insofar as it is the cause of health, and urine is called healthy, insofar as it indicates health. And although health is neither in medicine nor in urine, nevertheless in the one there is something in virtue of which it effects health, while in the other, something in virtue of which it is a sign of health.²⁶

The account of analogical sameness of meaning given in this passage has been aptly described as ‘source-dependent’ unity,²⁷ because on this view, analogically related terms derive their semantic unity from dependence relationships between the analogates and a common source (in this case, the health of an animal). The dependence relationships need not be of the same sort: the urine’s health depends on the animal’s health as *significans* depends upon *significandum*, whereas the medicine’s health depends on the animal’s health as an agent depends upon a patient. As Aquinas puts it, “To be a sign and to be a cause are different things. But health is one.”²⁸ In what follows, I will take source-dependence to be an intelligible analysis of analogical semantic unity. What is important to note here is that, in contrast to the compositional analysis, the source-dependence analysis does not involve positing a feature or underlying univocal concept shared by the analogous concepts of health. As Aquinas puts it, “health is neither in medicine nor in urine.”

²⁶ *ST I.16.6* corpus. Cf. *In Meta. XI.3.4*.

²⁷ This is Christopher Shields’ term for Aquinas’ account of analogy (cf. Shields, *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 106n126). For discussion of the closely related Aristotelian phenomenon of *πρός ἓν* equivocity, cf. Heike Sefrin-Weis, “Pros Hen And The Foundations Of Aristotelian Metaphysics,” in John J. Cleary and Gary M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 24 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 261–85.

²⁸ *In Meta. XI.3.4*.

Aquinas' source-dependence analysis does not constitute an explicit rejection of a compositional analysis. Nevertheless, in what follows, I will take it to imply that Aquinas does not regard analogical predication, of itself, as (even implicitly) postulating a univocal concept underlying the analogical concepts.²⁹ We will return to these features of analogy in our evaluation of Aquinas' Trinity claims. However, before doing so, let us turn to Aquinas' account of *being* and *unity*.

b) *The analogy of being*

Aquinas explicitly contrasts his own account of *being* with a univocal account which he attributes to Parmenides and Melissus. According to Aquinas, they were "deceived" into adopting ontological monism, i.e. "that being is one," because of a faulty prior assumption: "they treated being as one in concept and one in nature, like the nature of any genus."³⁰ Against this view, Aquinas affirms that being is one neither in concept nor in nature, and furthermore, that being is not a genus "but is said in many ways of different things."³¹ These claims

²⁹ My view thus differs from Jeffrey Brower's recent reading of Aquinas as endorsing a univocal concept of *being* underlying the ten analogically unified Aristotelian categories of being. According to Brower, *being* is a single ontological type whose "subtypes include substance and accident" (Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World*, 5). As Domenic D'Ettore has shown, a number of Thomists in the commentatorial tradition (including Paul Soncinas and Chrysostom Javelli), motivated by Scotist arguments, have also attributed to Aquinas a similar kind of implicit univocal theory of analogical unity, according to which, underlying any plurality of analogical concepts "there is one concept numerically for the diverse analogates, just as a numerically one concept signifies univocals" (Domenic D'Ettore, *Analogy after Aquinas* [Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018], 179). Readers following Brower's or Soncinas' readings of Aquinas will thus be unable to endorse key aspects of my analogical reading of Aquinas' Trinity claims. Insofar as my argument successfully accounts for the coherence of Aquinas' Trinity claims, it can be seen as revealing a further advantage of the non-univocal exegetical tradition of Aquinas' understanding of analogy taken by Herveaus Natalis, Thomas Sutton and others (cf. D'Ettore, *Analogy after Aquinas*, 187).

³⁰ *In Meta.* I.9.6. Cf. also *In Sent.* II.17.1.1 corpus.

³¹ *In Meta.* I.9.6. Cf. also *In Sent.* II.34.1.1 corpus. Elsewhere, Aquinas uses this phrase when explicitly rejecting univocity, saying that being is "said in many ways, and not univocally" (*In Meta.* I.17.7, emphasis added).

rejecting univocity are so far compatible with both an equivocal and an analogical account of *being*. However, Aquinas elsewhere makes clear that he also rejects an equivocal account of *being*, characterizing the different meanings of *being* not as wholly different but rather unified by source-dependence.³² For instance, in his commentary on *Metaphysics* 11, immediately after describing analogy in terms of the paradigmatic case of *health*, Aquinas gives *being* as a further instance of an analogical concept:

The same holds true regarding the many ways in which *being* is said; for *being simpliciter* is said to be that which has existence in itself, namely, substance; but other beings are so called because they are *of* that which exists in itself: either attributes, or habits, or anything else of this sort. For a quality is called a being, not because it itself has existence, but because a substance is said to be disposed by it. And so it is similarly with other accidents. This is why he says that they are *of* a being. And thus it is evident that the multiplicity of being has something common to which it is reduced.³³

It is noteworthy that Aquinas characterizes one primary kind of being, namely substance, as being *simpliciter*. An accident such as quality is a being insofar as “a substance is said to be disposed by it,” but this does not imply that “it itself has existence”—only a substance is said to have “existence in itself,” and hence can be called a being *simpliciter*. Elsewhere, in his commentary on *Sentences* II.42.1, Aquinas describes this distinction between unqualified and qualified predication of *being* as a key identifying feature of analogical concepts more generally:

There is a dual way of dividing what is common into what is under it, just as there is a dual way of being common. There is a division of a univocal [concept] into species, according to the

³² Aquinas elsewhere (*In Meta.* XI.3.1) rejects an equivocal account of being partly on the grounds that such an account would render impossible the discipline of metaphysics (the study of “being in common”).

³³ *In Meta.* XI.3.4.

differences by which the nature of the genus is equally participated in by the species, as *animal* divides into *man* and *horse*, and so on. But the other division concerns that which is common by analogy, which is predicated from one of the members according to its perfect concept (*perfectam rationem*), and from another, imperfectly and in a qualified way (*secundum quid*), as *being* divides into *substance* and *accident*, and into *actual being* and *potential being*: and this division is like an intermediate between the equivocal and the univocal.³⁴

Here, Aquinas takes the predication of *being* of substance and of accident, as an example of the general contrast between analogical predication *simpliciter* (“according to its perfect concept”) and *secundum quid* (“imperfectly and in a qualified way”). For Aquinas, this division is a sufficient marker of analogical predication, since the *secundum quid* qualification has no place in univocal predication: rather, every predication is according to the univocal concept in one and the same way. On the other hand, in equivocal predication, there is no *secundum quid* qualification for a different reason: equivocality disallows commonality of meaning, which is implied in the comparison between predication *simpliciter* and *secundum quid*. Following Aquinas’ terminology, in what follows I will refer back to this division as the *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization.

The question of what ontological implications follow from the *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization of *being*, is a matter of debate.³⁵ To reiterate, it is not my purpose here to evaluate the plausibility of Aquinas’ account of

³⁴ *In Sent.* II.42.1.3 corpus. For another discussion of this passage, cf. Klima, “Aquinas on One and Many,” *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale*, 11 (2000), 195-215.

³⁵ For a reading of Aquinas according to which substances “are the only things that properly and truly exist,” cf. Robert Pasnau, “On What There Is in Aquinas,” in Jeffrey Hause (ed.), *Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae: A Critical Guide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 10–28. For a more liberal reading which admits accidents into Aquinas’ “ultimate categories of being,” cf. Brower, *Aquinas’s Ontology of the Material World*, 47-54.

being.³⁶ What is important to note for present purposes, however, is that Aquinas' understanding of '*being simpliciter*' is distinctive when compared to understandings of that term given contemporary univocal assumptions about *being*.³⁷ On such assumptions, '*being simpliciter*' amounts to *being* understood in an unrestricted sense, considered independently of any given category of being and encompassing all such categories.³⁸ By contrast, for Aquinas, '*being simpliciter*' is *being* under the category of substance. Indeed, for Aquinas, the distinction between *simpliciter* and *secundum quid* does not countenance any overarching sense of category-independent *being*. Aquinas' position is also distinctive compared to contemporary analogical accounts of *being* which, although acknowledging partially different meanings of *being*, seek to posit an underlying concept unifying those different meanings, one that is thus univocal and category-independent.³⁹ In contrast to these accounts, Aquinas does not affirm any univocal category of *being* encompassing substance, quality, and relation as subcategories. For Aquinas, *being* has univocal application only *within* a given category (e.g. substance or quality).

³⁶ Michael Loux has argued that without a univocal account of *being*, it becomes impossible to even state the categories according to which "being is said in many ways" (Michael J. Loux, "Being, Categories, and Universal Reference in Aristotle," in Lila Haaparanta & Heikki Koskinen (eds.), *Categories of Being* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], 28). Loux is objecting to the understanding of being as non-univocal, as he finds it in Aristotle. It seems that a similar objection could be raised for the non-univocal interpretation of *being* attributed to Aquinas in this paper.

³⁷ Contemporary proponents of univocal *being* include George Molnar, who claims that "existence' is univocal, in that although there are different types of thing which exist, there is only one type of existence" (George Molnar, *Powers*, ed. Stephen Mumford [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 21). Many contemporary defenders of the univocity of *being* draw inspiration from Quine's claim that "to be is, purely and simply, to be the value of a variable" (W.V.O. Quine, "On What There Is," *Review of Metaphysics* 2 [1948], 32). For a different reading of Quine as "really a deflationist about ontological issues," cf. Huw Price, *Naturalism without Mirrors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 285.

³⁸ Arguably, this is implicit in David Lewis's claim that "When we quantify over less than all there is, we leave out things that (unrestrictedly speaking) exist *simpliciter*" (David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* [Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1986], 3).

³⁹ For an account of Heidegger's understanding of the analogy of being which posits such an underlying concept, cf. McDaniel, *The Fragmentation of Being*, 18–27.

c) *The analogy of unity*

Aquinas defines unity in terms of being: “this definition of unity is true: unity is being that is undivided.”⁴⁰ As such, it is not surprising that the analogical characteristics of *being* mentioned above find their way into *unity*. For instance, *unity* is non-generic: “unity cannot be a genus, insofar as being cannot be either, because it is not predicated univocally.” *Unity* also has categories derived from those of *being*:

[S]ince being and unity signify the same thing, and the species of things that are the same are themselves the same, there must be as many species of being as there are of unity, and they must correspond to each other.⁴¹

By “species of being,” Aquinas has in mind “substance, quantity and quality and so on.”⁴² Since these categories of being are related analogically, it is natural to suppose that Aquinas treats the categories of unity as analogically related in the same way. Aquinas makes this explicit in his commentary on *Metaphysics* 7, where he makes the point that *unity*, like *being*, is based upon the core notion of substance:

‘One’ is said in many ways, just as ‘being’ is. In one sense, ‘being’ signifies this particular thing, and in another, quantity, and in another, quality, and so on for the other categories. Yet it is predicated primarily of substance and secondarily of the other

⁴⁰ *In Sent.* I.24.1.3 ad 3; cf. also *In Meta.* X.4.2, *ST* I.11.1 corpus. This definition might give the impression that unity picks out a subclass of being (namely, the undivided beings), but, as Aquinas elsewhere makes clear, the notion of undividedness he has in mind is one that holds not just of some beings, but of every being, considered absolutely: “There is a negation consequent upon every being considered absolutely: its undividedness, and this is expressed by unity” (*DV* I.1 corpus). For Aquinas’ claim that unity adds no reality to being, differing only conceptually from it, cf. *In Meta.* IV.2.13.

⁴¹ *In Meta.* IV.2.14.

⁴² *In Meta.* IV.2.14.

categories. Therefore the term ‘one’ *simpliciter* will apply primarily to substance and secondarily to the other categories.⁴³

Aquinas’ multivocal characterization (“said in many ways”) and *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization (“primarily” in terms of substance and “secondarily of the other categories) of *unity* is thus remarkably close in structure to that of *being*.

These features of Aquinas’ characterization of *unity* extend to *plurality* and *distinction*, concepts which Aquinas regards as opposed to *unity*.⁴⁴ For Aquinas, *plurality* is closely tied to *unity* in that it adds nothing other than a negation: whereas *unity* adds nothing but ‘indivisibility’ to *being*, *plurality* adds nothing but ‘a certain division’ or ‘distinction’ to *unity*:

[*M*]ultitudo corresponding to [*unity*] adds this to the things described as many: that each of them is one, and that each of them is not the other, and in this lies the essence of distinction (*ratio distinctionis*). Accordingly then, while *unity* adds to *being* one negation inasmuch as a thing is undivided in itself, *multitudo* adds two negations, inasmuch as a certain thing is undivided in itself, and divided from another; i.e. one of them is not the other.⁴⁵

For Aquinas, the relationship between *unity* and *plurality* parallels the relationship between *being* and *non-being*. For instance, in Aquinas’ discussion of the relationship between unity and plurality in *Summa Theologiae* I.11.2, Aquinas begins by first discussing the way in which being can coexist with privation. Aquinas’ first point is effectively that privation is not non-being *simpliciter* but rather non-being only *secundum quid*: as he puts it, “no privation negates existence completely” but simply negates “some existence or other.”⁴⁶ Aquinas then generalizes, stating

⁴³ *In Meta.* VII.4.10; cf. *ST* I-II.17.4 corpus.

⁴⁴ Aquinas uses terms besides ‘plurality’ (*pluralitas*), including ‘number’ (*numerus*) and ‘multitude’ (*multitudo*), more or less interchangeably, in numerous contexts when discussing plurality in God (e.g. *In Sent.* I.24.1.2 corpus). In what follows, I will focus on ‘plurality.’

⁴⁵ *DP* 9.7 corpus; cf. *ST* I.11.2 ad 4.

⁴⁶ *ST* I.11.2 ad 4.

that “what holds for *being* also holds for *one* and *good* insofar as they are convertible with *being*.”⁴⁷ After this general claim, Aquinas makes explicit the *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization to illustrate his point:

For example, something that is a being *secundum quid*—as, e.g., a being in potentiality—is not a being *simpliciter*, i.e., a being in actuality. Again, something that is a being *simpliciter* in the genus of substance is not a being *secundum quid*, i.e., something with accidental being. Similarly therefore, what is good *secundum quid* is evil *simpliciter*, or vice versa. And, likewise, something that is one *simpliciter* is many *secundum quid*, and vice versa.⁴⁸

In this passage, Aquinas’ claims about the structural parallel between *being* and *unity* are extended to the concept of plurality. Just as the analogical structure of *being* allows for it to be said in many ways, likewise it allows for being and non-being to be opposed in many ways. Similarly, the analogical structure of *unity* allows for unity and plurality to be opposed, and to coexist, in many ways.

Given that plurality is defined in terms of distinction, the claim that plurality admits of an analogous *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization suggests that *distinction* (or *division*)⁴⁹ admits of a similarly analogical characterization. In his commentary on *Sentences* I.24.1, Aquinas makes this point explicit:

Just as the definition of unity consists in indivisibility, so the definition of number or of multitude consists in a certain division or in a certain distinction (*distinctione aliqua*). Hence, the things that we find divided *simpliciter*, we say are many *simpliciter*; and

⁴⁷ *ST* I.11.2 ad 4.

⁴⁸ *ST* I.11.2 ad 1.

⁴⁹ Strictly speaking, *division* involves the dividing of a whole into parts (*ST* I.31.2 corpus); *diversity* involves x having a distinct essence or form from y (cf. *In Sent.* I.24.1.2 corpus; *ST* I.31.2 ad 1); likewise, *difference* involves not only x not being y, but furthermore, x being different in form from y (cf. *ST* I.31.2 ad 2). however, Aquinas often uses these terms in a looser sense as interchangeable with *distinction*, as in the passage quoted below.

those that we find divided *secundum quid*, we say are many *secundum quid*.⁵⁰

Once again, the question of what implications follow from these analogical characterizations of *unity*, *plurality* and *distinction* is a matter of debate. What is important to note for present purposes is that the analogical framework governing *unity* is closely related to that of *being*. Just as *being* simpliciter is *being* under the category of substance, likewise, *unity* simpliciter is substantial unity. Likewise, just as neither *being* simpliciter nor *being* secundum quid involve a univocal, category-independent notion of *being*, likewise neither *unity* simpliciter nor *unity* secundum quid involve a univocal, category-independent notion of *unity*.

3. Analogy in the Trinity claims

So far, I have argued that Aquinas' conception of *unity* and *distinction* shares an analogical structure paralleling that of *being* and *health*. What remains to be seen is whether Aquinas puts this analogical structure to work in his discussions of the Trinity claims, and if so, how.

Given the dependence of Aquinas' account of unity and distinction upon *being*, the first question to ask is whether or not Aquinas admits different categories of being in God. In one sense, creaturely concepts of being do not apply to God at all.⁵¹ Thus, Aquinas states in some places that God is not a substance in the "fully proper" sense of that term, given that substance is a category of created being.⁵² Nevertheless, "in a broad sense" and "analogically," Aquinas is willing to speak of God as substance, insofar as God exists *per se* and does not

⁵⁰ *In Sent.* I.24.1.2 corpus.

⁵¹ For Aquinas' rejection of the univocal application of creaturely concepts to God, cf. *ST* I.13.1.

⁵² Aquinas' reason is that the name 'substance' is taken from that which 'lies underneath accidents,' and denotes a quiddity which is other than its existence; both of these features are proper to created substances only (*In Sent.* I.8.4.2 ad 1; cf. *ST* I.3.5 ad 1, *SCG* I.25.10).

exist in a dependent way.⁵³ Other categories of being have no application whatsoever to God. For instance, “God is not an accident, *simpliciter*,”⁵⁴ given that Aquinas regards the unity of God as ruling out all forms of composition, including the compositional relationship between a substance and accident.⁵⁵ However, for reasons we will consider below, Aquinas holds that relations do not posit any accidental being in God, and can thus be said truly of God. As such, “there remain only two modes of attribution which apply to divine persons, namely that of substance and relation.”⁵⁶

The applicability of *substance* and *relation* to God opens the possibility for Aquinas to recognize at least two different categories under which unity and plurality can be found in God. Aquinas puts these categories to work in his account of the Trinity claims by defining key concepts in terms of these two categories.⁵⁷ One example is Aquinas’ definition of *person* as “an individual substance of rational nature,”⁵⁸ and his claim that divine persons are individual only in virtue of a distinction of relations: “since the divine Persons are not distinguished by anything absolute, it is necessary that every distinction between them be according to relations of origin.”⁵⁹ In this way, both substance and relation feature in Aquinas’ understanding of divine personhood. As Aquinas puts it: “*divine person* signifies a relation as subsisting. And this is to signify relation by way of substance.”⁶⁰

This account of personhood allows Aquinas to treat the question of whether there is a plurality of Trinitarian persons as settled on the basis of

⁵³ *In Sent.* I.8.4.3 corpus.

⁵⁴ *In Sent.* I.8.4.2 ad 1.

⁵⁵ *In Sent.* I.8.4.3 corpus.

⁵⁶ *In Sent.* I.8.4.3 corpus.

⁵⁷ For Aquinas’ definition of ‘hypostasis’ in terms which align with his definition of ‘person,’ cf. *DP* 9.1 corpus.

⁵⁸ Aquinas here accepts Boethius’s definition of *person* (*ST* I.29.4 corpus); cf. *ST* I.29.1 and 3; *In Sent.* I.25.1.1; *DP* 9.2.

⁵⁹ *In Sent.* I.11.1.1 corpus.

⁶⁰ *ST* I.29.4 corpus.

whether there is “a plurality of real relations in God,”⁶¹ and the question of whether the divine persons are one God as settled on the basis of whether they are one substance.⁶²

Key to Aquinas’ understanding of the Trinity claims, then, is his oft-repeated claim that relational distinction in God is compatible with substantial unity. To take one well-known text, consider this affirmation of the real distinction of relations in *Summa Theologiae* I.28.3:

The very nature of relative opposition includes distinction. Hence, there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that thing which is absolute (*secundum rem absolutam*), namely the essence, in which there is supreme unity and simplicity; but rather, according to that thing which is relative (*secundum rem relativam*).⁶³

Aquinas clearly does not see even an apparent difficulty in positing a real distinction between divine relations alongside the “absolute” and “supreme” unity of the divine essence. Yet for some recent commentators, this claim appears to border on incoherence. How could Aquinas affirm such a distinction alongside an affirmation of supreme unity?

Aquinas’ analogical account of unity provides a straightforward explanation of why Aquinas does not see even an apparent conflict here. As we have seen, Aquinas holds that unity is always unity *under a given category*, and likewise for distinction. Given that *substantial unity* and *relational unity* are related as unity *simpliciter* and unity *secundum quid*, distinction under the category of relation will also be distinction *secundum quid*, posing no threat as such to substantial unity, or unity *simpliciter* (as Aquinas refers to it here, the “supreme unity” of the divine essence). As Aquinas would say, plurality and distinction pose no threat to unity

⁶¹ *ST*I.30.1 corpus; cf. *ST*I.28.3.

⁶² Hence, in one place, Aquinas can say: “the one divine substance is common to the three Persons: hence Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God” (*DP* 7.3 ad 1).

⁶³ *ST*I.28.3 corpus.

as such, unless it is distinction or plurality *under the very same category of being* as that of the divine substance, which is precisely what is denied here.

It is worth acknowledging the structural parallel between this aspect of Aquinas' Trinity claims, and the theory of relative identity attributed to Aquinas by Peter Geach. Just as Geach rejects the suggestion that the Trinity claims can be adequately formulated as claims about two things being 'absolutely identical' to a third (at least if this is understood to involve statements of the form 'x is absolutely identical to y'),⁶⁴ Aquinas' analogical account of unity avoids the related assumption that the Trinity claims are adequately formulated with one univocal concept of unity or distinction.

However, it is worth noting that Aquinas' account has the resources to avoid an objection facing relative-identity readings of the Trinity claims. The objection is that relative-identity accounts fail to prevent a reformulation of the problem of coherence in terms of the following claims: *each divine person is the same extra-mental entity as the divine essence*, on the one hand, and *each divine person is a distinct extra-mental entity from the other*.⁶⁵ These claims allow the problem of coherence to arise once more because they are adequately formulated from the perspective of relative identity, so long as 'extra-mental entity' is considered a legitimate count noun.

However, this particular reformulation does not pose a threat to Aquinas' account of the Trinity claims. For 'extra-mental entity' is either an overarching, univocal category of being, or else it is analogical. If it is univocal, then the formulation of the problem involves an assumption implicitly rejected by Aquinas' account of unity, namely, that being is "one in concept." On the other hand, if 'extra-mental entity' is understood to be analogical and 'said in many ways,'

⁶⁴ For Geach, such identity statements are logically incomplete, unless they are understood as short for 'x is the *same A* as y', where A represents a countable noun—in the same way that Aquinas regards 'x and y are one *simpliciter*' to be short for 'x and y are one *substance*.' Cf. P.T. Geach, "Identity," *The Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967), 3–12.

⁶⁵ This formulation is due to J.T. Paasch, "Aquinas on the Trinity," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Critical Guide*, ed. Jeffrey Hause (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 68–87.

then the claims can be properly understood as *each divine person is the same extra-mental substance as the divine essence* and *each divine person is a distinct extra-mental relation from the other*. Thus interpreted, Aquinas would accept both claims, but the apparent inconsistency is dissolved.

To sum up, insofar as the problem of coherence posits a conflict between distinction and unity *as such* in the Trinity, the problem simply does not arise for Aquinas, given his assumptions about analogical unity. That being said, other objections can be formulated for Aquinas' account which are adequately formulated within the context of his assumptions concerning analogical unity. Here I will focus only on two potential objections, one concerning the coherence of Aquinas' claims about the unity and simplicity of the divine essence, the other concerning the real distinction of persons.

a) *Safeguarding simplicity*

One potential threat to the coherence of Aquinas' account of the Trinity claims concerns the nature of essential unity. Aquinas' strong doctrine of divine simplicity is in one place described as the claim that God is "in every way one."⁶⁶ Does this claim (which seems stronger than the claim that God is merely one in substance) contradict Aquinas' claim that relations in God are *not* one, but instead constitute a really distinct plurality?

It is helpful to understand Aquinas' claim that God is "in every way one" in terms of his definition of unity as "being that is undivided." Given this definition, Aquinas expresses the doctrine of divine simplicity in terms of both being and undividedness: the divine substance is "supremely one" insofar as it is "supremely being," and furthermore, insofar as it is "supremely undivided," that is to say, "divided neither actually, nor potentially, by any mode of division."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *ST* I.13.12 corpus.

⁶⁷ *ST* I.11.4 corpus.

While Aquinas sometimes uses ‘division’ as a synonym for ‘distinction,’ in this context Aquinas is using it in a more narrow sense to mean a division of a whole into parts.⁶⁸

For Aquinas, then, the threat of incoherence emerges only if relational distinction introduces some kind of composition into God. This is a very real threat for Aquinas, given his position that creaturely relations are founded upon, and imply the existence of, accidental being in their subject. Since substance-accident composition is ruled out by the divine simplicity, Aquinas needs to show that divine relations pose no risk of introducing such accidental being into the Trinity. For Aquinas, this is a key clear desideratum of an account of divine relations:

In us, the relations have a dependent *esse* because their *esse* is other than the *esse* of the substance. Hence, they have a proper mode of being in their proper nature (*ratio*), just as happens in the case of the other accidents [...] This situation, of course, has no place in divinity, since there is in God no other *esse* than that of substance, for whatever is in God is substance.⁶⁹

Aquinas addresses this potential conflict by articulating an account of divine relations on which they clearly constitute no addition of accidental being to God. As Aquinas puts it, “from the fact that one posits a relation in God, it does not follow that there is in God some dependent *esse*, but only that there is in God a certain directedness (*respectus aliquis*) in which the essence of relation consists.”⁷⁰ Aquinas’ account of divine relations is *ontologically minimalist* insofar as it does not treat relations as, in any sense, an addition of being over and above the divine essence. Aquinas can affirm, for instance, that relations in God are “the same in reality” with the divine essence, differing from it only conceptually.⁷¹ Given the

⁶⁸ Cf. *ST I*.31.2 corpus.

⁶⁹ *SCG IV*.14.12.

⁷⁰ *SCG IV*.14.12.

⁷¹ *ST I*.28.2 corpus.

merely conceptual distinction between the relations and the divine essence, Aquinas can safely claim that a plurality of relationally distinct persons in God poses no threat whatsoever to the unity of the divine essence:

Person, as above stated, signifies relation as subsisting in the divine nature. But relation as referred to the essence does not differ as a thing (*re*), but only conceptually (*ratione*); while as compared to an opposed relation, it has a real distinction by virtue of that opposition. Thus there are one essence and three persons.⁷²

This passage reveals the utility of Aquinas' minimalist approach to the ontology of relations: by treating relations as the very same thing as the divine *esse*, differing only conceptually from it, he can avoid the risk of any apparent conflict between divine simplicity and the affirmation of real relations (and relational distinction) in God.

b) Accounting for real distinction

Aquinas' ontologically minimalist account of relations brings us to a second potential objection. Given that relations in God are 'the same in reality' with the divine essence and differ only conceptually from it, does Aquinas' account of relational distinction risk coming into conflict with his affirmation that such a distinction constitutes a *real distinction* between the persons?

One way of putting the objection is that the merely conceptual distinction between the relations and the divine essence implies that the relations are ob-

⁷² *ST*I.39.1 corpus.

jectionably mind-dependent. This objection threatens a conflict between Aquinas' account of relational distinction and the background assumption that the Trinity claims describe mind-independent features of God.⁷³

Aquinas' analogical account of unity has distinctive resources for resolving this particular objection. For note that the claim *that divine relations differ from the divine essence only in 'meaning' or 'concept'* (*rationem tantum*), renders the Trinity objectionably mind-dependent only if it is also the case that the concepts in question are purely in the mind, and not grounded in an appropriate way in extramental reality. However, Aquinas' account of *unity* is inseparable from his account of *being*, and the plurality of senses of *being* is in turn based upon a plurality of mind-independent modes of being.⁷⁴ For Aquinas, then, the claim that the distinct relations differ only in concept from the divine substance or essence, is not grounded in a partly or wholly conventional plurality of human ways of conceptualizing. Rather, it is ultimately grounded in mind-independent modes of being in God. Thus, Aquinas can say that, while the concept of a divine relation is only in the mind, "there is in reality something [in God] corresponding to it in which it is founded."⁷⁵

However, this leads to a further way of pressing the objection, namely, that real distinction arguably requires a distinction between things which do not wholly overlap in being or *esse* in the way that Aquinas' minimalist ontology of divine relations implies.⁷⁶ The principle that real distinction requires a distinction between entities of a more robust sort than Aquinas' divine relations, is voiced in an objection from Aquinas' commentary on *Sentences* I.2.1, which appeals to the principle that real distinction must be between *distinct things* (rather than simply the aspects of, or relations within, a given thing):

⁷³ One version of this objection is found in Michael Rea's objection to Peter Geach's relative identity theory of the Trinity ("Relative Identity and the Doctrine of the Trinity," in Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (eds.), *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 260).

⁷⁴ *DVI.1* corpus.

⁷⁵ *In Sent.* I.33.1.1 ad 3.

⁷⁶ For a similar objection, cf. Paasch, "Aquinas on the Trinity," 77.

Augustine says that the three persons are in no way absolutely distinguished, but only insofar as they are relative (*ad aliquid*). A thing, however, is not a relation, but is absolute. Therefore it seems that the three persons are not things, and thus there is no real distinction there.⁷⁷

Interestingly, in his reply, Aquinas does not deny the principle that real distinction is between things. Rather, he denies that *thing* is restricted only to absolute things and does not include relations:

Thing (res) is among the transcendentals, and that is why it is has common application to absolutes and to relatives; and that is why there is an essential thing according to which the persons do not differ, and a relational or personal thing, according to which the persons are distinguished.⁷⁸

Aquinas' claim that *thing* is among the transcendentals is a reference to its primacy over the Aristotelian categories, and presupposes the possibility of speaking of *things* simpliciter (substances) as well as *things* secundum quid (including qualities, relations and the like). Aquinas makes this point explicit in his commentary on *Sentences* I.25.1, where he claims that "it is from *quiddity* that the name *thing* (res) is derived."⁷⁹ This, in turn, allows for a *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization of *thing*, because *quiddity* in turn admits of a *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization, one which can be found in God:

If by 'quiddity' we mean not only the nature absolutely (*natura absoluta*), but the *ratio* or intention of some substance, accident or relation, in that case, although there is in God only one quiddity absolutely, nevertheless, there are several *rationes* of real relations, and so in a certain way, several quiddities, although this cannot be conceded strictly speaking: because *quiddity*, *essence* and *definition* is only of substances *simpliciter*, as Aristotle proves, and

⁷⁷ *In Sent.* I.2.1.5 obj. 2.

⁷⁸ *In Sent.* I.2.1.5 ad 2. For a similar statement cf. *ST* I.39.3 ad 3; *DP* 9.5 ad 14.

⁷⁹ *In Sent.* I.25.1.4 corpus.

it is in this sense that the name ‘thing’ can be predicated plurally and singly.⁸⁰

In this passage, Aquinas affirms that the plurality of things in God is grounded in a plurality of quiddities *secundum quid*, while the existence of just one thing in God can also be affirmed in virtue of there being one quiddity *simpliciter* corresponding to the divine substance. The analogical nature of *thing* corresponds to Aquinas’ analogical account of relational distinction and substantial distinction. While Aquinas does not explicitly speak here of *real distinction* in analogical terms, his appeal to real distinction as *between things* (in light of the analogy of *thing*) suggests the following reading of Aquinas’ claims about real distinction in the Trinity: Real distinction between the divine relations is *secundum quid* insofar as it is a distinction between *things secundum quid*; there is no real distinction between the divine essence and anything (including the persons) *simpliciter*, in view of the divine essence’s status as the one *thing simpliciter* in God.⁸¹

In short, Aquinas’ strategy for avoiding contradiction between his affirmation of real distinction on the one hand, and his minimalist ontology of divine relations on the other, is to qualify his predication of *real distinction* between the divine persons, so that it contains no implication of any distinction between entities other than relations, nor any need to posit additional entities over and above the simple divine essence.

In closing this section, it is worth acknowledging that the plausibility of Aquinas’ strategies for resolving tension between unity and distinction of the divine persons as outlined here, ultimately hinges on issues which this paper has not tried to cover, such as the plausibility of Aquinas’ ontology of relations and his broader analogical semantics of *being* and *unity*. My focus in this section has

⁸⁰ *In Sent.* I.25.1.4 ad 2.

⁸¹ This understanding of real distinction provides a basis for Aquinas’ affirmation elsewhere that the real distinction of divine persons is the “most minimal” real distinction that there can be, due to the fact that relation is the “most minimal being” (*In Sent.* I.26.2.2 ad 2; cf. *DP* 8.1 ad 4).

been not on the plausibility but rather the coherence of Aquinas' reading of the Trinity claims. I have argued that Aquinas is careful to affirm a relational distinction of persons which does not posit any division or addition of *esse* in the divine substance. Furthermore, he endorses a semantics of *real distinction* flexible enough to encompass not only distinction at the level of *esse* in God, but also relational distinction. These strategies enable Aquinas to affirm the Trinity claims in a way that avoids any conflict with his commitment to a simple divine essence.

4. Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to show how Aquinas' account of analogy provides resources for resolving the *prima facie* conflict arising from (1) his claim that the divine relations, which constitute the persons, are 'one and the same' (*unum et idem*) with the divine essence; (2) his insistence on real distinctions between the Trinitarian relations, and (3) his affirmation of the absolute simplicity of the divine essence. To achieve this aim, I began with a general discussion of Aquinas' account of analogy, focusing on Aquinas' account of *unity*. I have argued that Aquinas's analogical understanding of *unity* not only dissolves the problem of coherence but sheds light on key texts in Aquinas' account of the Trinity which have constituted a puzzle for recent commentators.

I have argued that Aquinas' understanding of analogy enables Aquinas to affirm apparently opposed claims, insofar as Aquinas' *simpliciter/secundum quid* characterization allows for unity to be affirmed and denied of the same thing in different senses. In the case of the Trinity claims, this involves affirming that the divine persons are one *simpliciter*, while really distinct (and many) *secundum quid*.

Is the Aquinas' resolution of logical conflicts in the Trinity one that is ultimately satisfying? Whether it is or not will depend on whether philosophers and theologians are prepared to accept all the implications which follow from an analogical account of key terms like *being*, *unity* and *distinction*. Whether such

an account is ultimately defensible is a central question, not only for Trinitarian theology, but for metaphysics and philosophical theology more generally. Aquinas' own position is clear: an analogical approach to being, unity and distinction is inseparable from the coherent affirmation of Trinitarian orthodoxy.⁸²

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