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# Questioning Authority: Anthony Collins' Challenge to Orthodox Anglican Authority Figures and George Berkeley's Reply

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**Abstract:** In this paper I argue that the English freethinker Anthony Collins (1676–1729) is making use of ‘conglotation’ to develop an argument across the *Vindication of the Divine Attributes* (1710) and the *Discourse on Free-Thinking* (1713), which aims to challenge the religious authority of orthodox representatives of the Anglican church. That is, Collins makes use of a rhetorical (piecemeal) strategy that serves to insinuate one’s proper position to create, what I will call, the ‘authority-challenge’. I reconstruct this challenge in three steps. First, I analyse Collins’ criticism of William King (1650–1729), the Archbishop of Dublin, who according to Collins’ *Vindication* advances a conception of the divine attributes and of the nature of God that is compatible with atheism. Second, I introduce Collins’ argument from disagreement, which he develops in his *Discourse*. This argument aims to establish that whenever there is meaningful disagreement, e. g., about the (philosophical) content and not merely about the best terminology, between the supposed experts, we have the right to think on our own about the issue at hand. In the third step, I present the ‘authority-challenge’. In a nutshell, this challenge requires orthodox representatives of the Anglican church either (i) to open the door to atheism by not substantively disagreeing with William King (thereby undermining everything they stand for and presenting themselves as hypocrites) or (ii) to substantively disagree with King to contain atheism (thereby undermining their status as experts for religious issues). Since (i) cannot be an option, they have no choice but to undermine their own authority by impairing their expert status, which, in turn, has ramifications for their political power as well. In the second part of my paper, I argue that §§ 16–22 of the fourth dialogue of George Berkeley’s *Alciphron* (1732/52) are designed to meet Collins’ ‘authority-challenge’. This will allow me to resolve the puzzle that these sections so far have posed for commentators. In particular, many have been puzzled by Berkeley’s argumentative strategy and in particular his references to the Scholastics. As I argue, however, if §§ 16–22 are read in the light of Collins’ authority challenge, it becomes evident that Berkeley uses these references in his attempt to refute King without failing to meet Collins’ challenge.

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# 1 Introduction

The English freethinker Anthony Collins (1676–1729) is currently best known for his friendship with Locke<sup>1</sup> and his debate with Newton’s confidant Samuel Clarke.<sup>2</sup> Most scholarly interest in Collins remains confined to the question of whether he was an atheist or a deist.<sup>3</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this paper to resolve the question of Collins’ atheism, I will build on the insight of recent defenders of an atheist interpretation. These commentators argue that Collins advocates his atheism in ‘fragments’, which are distributed across several of his writings.<sup>4</sup> According to this reading Collins makes use of ‘conglobation’. That is, a rhetorical (piecemeal) strategy that serves to insinuate one’s proper position, viz., atheism, by ridiculing its opponents, viz., priests and the church, and their religious authority (Taranto 2000, 118, 145).

I argue that Collins deploys this strategy to develop an argument across the *Vindication of the Divine Attributes* (1710) and the *Discourse on Free-Thinking* (1713), which has hitherto not been appreciated in detail.<sup>5</sup> This argument aims to challenge the religious authority of orthodox representatives of the Anglican church – an expression by which I denote a group of people who (usually) hold some office within the Anglican Church and who seek to conform to its established principles, such as the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Dybikowski 2011, 18–24; Wolfe 2007, 39–43.

2 Cf. Attfeld 1977; Rozemond 2009, Thompson, 2011; Uzgalis 2018.

3 There are two conflicting readings of Collins. Some interpreters defend the position that Collins is a deist or “an anticlerical protestant” (O’Higgins 1976, 89; cf. also Benítez 2007, 27). Various scholars share Berkeley’s opinion (*TVV* § 6) that Collins is an atheist in disguise (cf. Agnesina 2018, 192; Berman 2013, 71; Taranto 2000, 246). Uzgalis is one of the few that remain neutral on this issue. He limits himself to pointing out what he believes would be needed to establish Collins’ atheism beyond any (reasonable) doubt (Uzgalis 2020, §§ 4.2. and 6.2).

4 Cf. Taranto 2000, 246. This interpretation has recently been defended at length by Agnesina (2018, 185–92), who argues that putting the pieces together reveals Collins’ “systematic atheism”. Note that in the case at hand it is entirely up to the reader to piece the puzzle together.

5 Collins’ *Vindication*, particularly his criticism of King’s position, have been discussed at length and also connected with the *Discourse* (cf. Berman 2013, 82–88; Agnesina 2018, ch. 4; Uzgalis 2020, § 4.2, Taranto 2000, 242–44). However, these commentators primarily focus on how Collins’ discussion of the nature and attributes of God may illuminate his stance on atheism.

6 Cf. <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion#I>. The so-called 39 articles, formulated in the wake of the English Reformation, contain the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. While they were relegated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to an appendix to the revised *Book of Common Prayer*, they are still immensely important in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, you could not hold a civil office from 1672 to 1828 without (publicly) endorsing to these articles. These articles were repeat-

My primary aim in this paper is to reconstruct this underappreciated argument, which I call the ‘authority-challenge’, in three steps. First, I focus on Collins’ *Vindication*, where he argues that William King (1650–1729), the Archbishop of Dublin, advances a conception of the divine attributes and of the nature of God that is compatible with atheism. In this way, Collins forces the hand of other orthodox Anglican authority figures: in order to contain atheism, they must refute King’s position (cf. Section 2). In Section 3 I focus on Collins’ *Discourse* where he defines the domain of expertise (viz., religious issues) of orthodox Anglican authority figures such as King and attacks the latter’s position again. This time as being incompatible with the 39 articles. This provides an additional incentive to orthodox Anglican authority figures to disagree with King. While this seems simple enough at first sight, the intricate nature of Collins’ challenge becomes evident when his argument from disagreement (AD) is considered. At its core the argument states: “Where experts [*substantively*; my addition] disagree, any person is free to reason for themselves” (Uzgalis 2020, § 4.3). Whenever the supposed experts *substantively* disagree and advance conflicting opinions, Collins argues, we have a right to think freely. In other words, whenever there is meaningful disagreement, e. g., about the (philosophical) content and not merely about the best terminology, between the supposed experts, we have the right to think on our own about the issue at hand. Since in these instances we would leave it to chance whether we end up with the right opinion if we just blindly follow an expert’s lead. Thus, if any (orthodox) representative of the Anglican church (i. e., an ‘expert’) were to substantially disagree with King (i. e., another ‘expert’) it would provide another case in point for Collins’ AD. In fact, in the eyes of anyone who takes the AD seriously, Collins’ criticisms of William King confront orthodox Anglican authority figures with the following challenge (cf. Section 4): *either* (i) they open the door to atheism by not substantively disagreeing with King (thereby undermining everything they stand for and presenting themselves as hypocrites) *or* (ii) they substantively disagree with King to contain atheism (thereby undermining their status as experts for religious issues). Since (i) *cannot* be an option, they have no choice but to undermine their own authority

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edly attacked by Collins. In particular, he takes issue with the 20<sup>th</sup> article. This article establishes the authority of the church in religious controversies. In *Priestcraft in Perfection* (3–10) Collins suggests this insistence on religious authority is inherently flawed because it renders Anglicanism into a form of Catholicism. He even attacks the previously mentioned part of Article XX as a forgery (*Priestcraft in Perfection*, 11–14). A point he further develops in book length over a decade later (cf. *Historical and Critical Essay on the Thirty-Nine Articles*, iii–xvi). For more on this cf. Agnesina 2018, ch. 3.

by impairing their expert status, which, in turn, has ramifications for their political power as well.<sup>7</sup>

Although it would have been possible to ignore Collins' 'authority challenge' or to refute it by attacking his AD, there is at least one orthodox Anglican authority figure who tries to meet Collins' challenge on its own terms: the Bishop of Cloyne, George Berkeley. I argue in the second part of the paper that §§ 16–22 of the fourth dialogue of Berkeley's *Alciphron* (1732/52) are designed to meet the 'authority-challenge'. In these sections Berkeley presents – and rejects – the views of a certain freethinker whom he calls 'Diagoras' (*Alc.* 4.16). There is a widespread consensus that Berkeley's 'Diagoras' is intended to represent Collins and that *Alc.* 4.16–22 ought to be read as a reaction to him.<sup>8</sup> Most scholars have nevertheless puzzled over the nature of Berkeley's reaction. In particular, commentators have so far not been able to explain why Berkeley refers to the writings of several Scholastic thinkers in this context. It remains unclear why he thought that doing so would help him to reject Collins' views. One of the best illustrations of this general perplexity can be found in Jonathan Bennett's abridged edition of *Alc.* 4.16–22. Instead of providing the text of § 19, Bennett writes: "Crito embarks on a long and learned lecture [...], but rather than going into all those details we can safely jump ahead" (Bennett 2017, 65).<sup>9</sup>

The upshot of my reading is that it can resolve the puzzle Berkeley's argumentative strategy and in particular his references to the Scholastics have posed. If §§ 16–22 are read in light of Collins' authority challenge, it becomes evident

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<sup>7</sup> Note that a stronger reading of the 'authority-challenge' is possible. According to this reading the argument is an attempt to (covertly) promote atheism, which in the very least successfully challenges the expert status of orthodox Anglican authority figures as well as their (political) power. Yet, this stronger reading only makes sense if Collins were in fact an atheist and so (since I remain neutral on that issue) I will not consider it in the following.

<sup>8</sup> Most notably, this interpretation was defended by Taranto 2010, 361–65. For more, cf. Agnesina 2018, 14–17; Berman 2013, 72 and 1993, 11; Daniel 2020, 262f.; O'Higgins, 1976, 93; Pearce, 2018, 179.

<sup>9</sup> While other commentators do not go that far, they generally have little to say on the issue or pass over it in silence (Berman 1993, 2–7; Grzeliński 2017, 181–87; Hochschild 2004, 162). The question is, e. g., not addressed at all in the volume on *Alciphron* published by Jaffro, Brykman, and Schwartz. By contrast, Breidert notes that these sections serve to tell a history of the doctrine of analogy, but he says nothing about the argumentative purpose of such a history (Breidert 1996, XV–XXVIII). The same holds for Luce and Jessop (*Works* III, 13–18) as well as Daniel. The latter offers an insightful reading of these passages in light of Berkeley's understanding of the mind (Daniel 2011, 149–57), which highlights the consistency of Berkeley's views but sheds comparatively little light on the more "narrowly theological point about divine predication" (Daniel 2020, 261) that Berkeley is trying to make. Crucially for my purposes, Daniel does also not address the question of why Berkeley invokes the Scholastics.

that Berkeley uses these references in his attempt to refute King without failing to meet Collins' challenge. Berkeley aims to establish that what *looks* like a substantive disagreement between King and him about a religious issue, viz. the nature and attributes of God, is in fact a problem of correctly interpreting the Scholastic terms 'analogy' and 'analogical' – which King, for whatever reason, misunderstands. So, what seems like a substantive disagreement about the content of our notion of God is ultimately the result of an unfortunate (and isolated) exegetical mistake on King's part, which results in a misapplication of a traditional and unanimously accepted doctrine.

## 2 Collins' *Vindication* and his Criticism of William King

My aim in this section is to explain the foundation of the first part of Collins' 'authority-challenge'. In the *Vindication*, he argues that William King's notion of God is compatible with atheism,<sup>10</sup> thereby charging a senior member of the Anglican Church with advancing a position that conflicts with its basic commitment to theism. In so doing, he puts pressure on other orthodox Anglican authority figures to refute King's position.

In 1709, Archbishop William King preached a sermon in Dublin on *Divine Predestination and Foreknowledge, Consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will*. The text was published in Dublin the same year, and in London the following year.<sup>11</sup> As the *Sermon's* full title indicates, King was primarily concerned with the problem of predestination: how can divine predestination be consistent with

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<sup>10</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate in detail the notion of 'atheism' Collins is working with. The charge of atheism was extremely popular as a rhetorical device during this period (cf. Agnesina 2018, 10–13). It was directed against anyone whose system seemed at odds with (orthodox) theism. For example, thinkers such as Spinoza or Hobbes were often charged with atheism. Collins' charge against King seems to be different in at least two ways. On the one hand Collins is not concerned with defending (orthodox) theism and on the other he seems to believe that King's notion of God would be acceptable to what Clarke has called a "speculative atheist" (cf. *Demonstration*, 4).

<sup>11</sup> While King can be considered one of the most influential Irish intellectuals of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Fauske 2016, 1–10, and 173–84), he has not received much attention from historians of philosophy, whose focus remains confined to his *Sermon*. A comprehensive analysis of King's position in the *Sermon* and of its influence and reception can be found in Berman's "Introduction" (*Sermon*, 9–27), his use of the so-called Molyneux man is scrutinized in: Fasko/West 2020a. King's understanding and account of human free-will as expounded in his book *De Origine Mali*

human freedom and the contingency of events (*Sermon* §§ 1–3)? When King argues for a compatibilist solution, the nature of God and of the divine attributes take centre stage. Since his solution hinges on a specific interpretation of the divine nature and attributes:

[I]t is in effect agreed on all hands, that the Nature of God, as it is in it self, is incomprehensible by human Understanding; and not only his Nature, but likewise his Powers and Faculties, and the ways and methods in which he exercises them, are so far beyond our reach, that we are utterly incapable of framing exact and adequate Notions of them. *Sermon* § 3.

According to King, everyone agrees that we have only a very limited and inadequate understanding of the divine nature or of God's attributes. Whatever we attribute to God is "only comparatively and improperly ascrib'd to God, and by way of Analogy and Accommodation to our Capacitys, *as if* they were properly and univocally the same in him and in us [my emphasis]" (*Sermon* § 7). He believes our notions of the divine nature and attributes are no more adequate than the notions of light and colour possessed by someone who was born blind (*Sermon* §§ 7 and 13).

King argues that the people who claim that human free-will and divine predestination are inconsistent overlook this *fundamental* difference (*Sermon* §§ 7 and 30–32). He contends that *if* God's foreknowledge *were* of the same kind as ours, *then* free-will and the contingency of events *would be* inconsistent with divine predestination and foreknowledge (*Sermon* § 7). However, King believes that "they are quite of another nature" (*Sermon* § 11).

In short, King uses an analogical interpretation of the divine nature and attributes *to solve* the problem of predestination. This is acknowledged by Collins (*Vindication*, 10) who concedes that King's solution seems to be successful at first glance (*Vindication*, 11).<sup>12</sup> However, Collins points out that this solution comes at a cost: "According to his Grace's [i. e., King's] Notions, it is impossible for him to prove the Existence of God against Atheists" (*Vindication*, 12). The compatibility of King's view with atheism becomes the focal point of Collins' criticism.

According to Collins, King's main problem is that his notion of God is devoid of any (meaningful) content. Given that King's position entails that no attribution

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from 1702 has been scrutinized recently (cf. Pearce 2019). Finally, Jones 2021, 136–41, has shed some more light on the relationship between King and Berkeley.

<sup>12</sup> It becomes evident that Collins believes King ultimately fails in this regard. He argues that by denying that God has foreknowledge in the proper and literal sense, King has also denied that God has foreknowledge at all. Thus, King cannot prove that divine foreknowledge and human will are consistent, since he has denied the existence of the former (*Vindication*, 19).

to God can “be understood to signify the same thing when apply’d to God and to Men” (*Vindication*, 10), he cannot possibly mean more by ‘God’ than a “general cause or effect” (*Vindication*, 13). As Collins points out there is no reason why atheists would not accept such a notion of the deity, because they also “allow some general Cause of all Effects to have eternally existed” (*Vindication*, 14). They would only disagree with King about the attributes of this ‘general Cause’. For example, an atheist would deny that this cause is wise, or would refuse the supposition that it is immaterial, equating it instead with the “Material Universe” (*Vindication*, 14).

In fact, Collins believes that even these differences are irrelevant. Without a literal understanding of God’s attributes, the question of God’s existence becomes moot – at least as far as our daily life is concerned – since King’s position forces us to give up

[a]ll the Arguments for God’s Government of the World, for rewarding and punishing men in a future State [...]; [furthermore] we lose the Use and Benefit of the Notion of God, that is, such a [Kingian] Notion has no influence on our Practice; what signifies contending with the Atheist about so poor a Speculation as the Question of the Existence of an *Eternal Immaterial Being*? For whether he be Material or Immaterial, if he can have neither Understanding, nor Will, nor Justice, it is all alike. *Vindication*, 14 f.

Here, Collins contends that it becomes futile to debate with atheists about the existence of God if you adopt a position like King’s. For whatever God is, will not influence our daily lives or whatever comes after our passing. Collins argues that the divine attributes – on King’s understanding of them – lose all power to guide us and to positively influence our way of living. For example, if we cannot know what divine goodness or holiness amount to, it is impossible for us to imitate them as the Bible demands (*Vindication*, 17; 1 Peter 1:16).

It must be noted that King is aware of this danger and tries to defend himself. He argues that his analogical notions of God have to be distinguished from metaphors because they serve different purposes. Metaphors represent things well known to us differently, while analogies aim “to give us some notion of things whereof we have no Knowledge” (*Sermon* § 21). However, Collins contends that King is unable to explain *how* they can serve this function – especially since the latter’s illustration of his position with a map fails (cf. *Sermon* § 8; *Vindication*, 23 f.).<sup>13</sup> Collins’ criticism was perceived to be fair by fellow Anglican authority

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<sup>13</sup> Simply put, Collins argues that maps cannot provide anyone with conceptions or ideas of the things they depict. Rather, a map is only instructive to someone who already knows what the things it depicts are. The reason for this is that the symbols on a map signify by convention. The

figures. For example, Peter Browne (c. 1665–1735), the Bishop of Cork and Ross, after stressing that King and he advance the same position (*Procedure*, 11), admits that King’s incautious wording and insufficient demarcation of metaphor from analogy opened the door for Collins to attack the analogical solution (*Procedure*, 2–22). Browne also concedes to Collins that King’s illustration in the form of a map is insufficient (*Procedure*, 16). However, in arguing the way he does, Browne plays right into Collins’ hand (cf. Section 4).

### 3 Collins’ *Discourse* and his Argument from Disagreement

In this section I explain the motivations for the second part of Collins’ ‘authority-challenge’ in two steps. First, I lay out his argument from disagreement (AD). Second, I demonstrate how Collins’ presentation of King in the *Discourse* puts additional pressure on orthodox Anglican authority figures to refute the latter’s position.

In 1713, three years after the publication of the *Vindication*, Collins published his next major text: the *Discourse on Free-Thinking*. In this work’s opening section, Collins argues that we have the right to think freely, “because there is no other way to discover the truth” (*Discourse*, 4). In his correspondence with Locke, Collins stresses that “Truth in the love of it, is what I aim at” (Letter no. 10, 69).<sup>14</sup> As he puts it in the *Discourse* (91): “A layman wants to know the truth, and the priest desires to have him of his opinion”. Unsurprisingly, Collins thus argues that our endeavour to understand a given proposition should be determined *solely* by the available evidence. He characterises freethinking as “[t]he use of the understanding, in endeavouring to find out the meaning of any proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of evidence for or against it, and in judging of

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blue line that represents the river is the result of a conventional decision by people who know what a river is and what it looks like. The blue line cannot convey the idea of water to someone who has never seen water, however (*Vindication*, 23 f.). This creates a problem for King because he holds no one can know God and the map was intended to rectify this issue (*Sermon* § 8). More on this issue and its larger context can be found in: Fasko/West 2020b (esp. note 22).

<sup>14</sup> For this he is much lauded by Locke who even says Collins is someone “to whom I might communicate what I thought true freely” (Letter no. 11, 71). Collins and Locke also discuss whether there is a need for “Authentick Interpreters of the word of God” (Letter no. 9, 67). While Collins does not explicitly answer Locke’s question in the correspondence, he clearly denies this need elsewhere (cf. Dybikowski 2011, 67 n28).



it according to the seeming force or weakness of the evidence” (*Discourse*, 3).<sup>15</sup> Collins is adamant that people judge freely for themselves if something can be regarded as a reason for believing the truth or falsehood of a given proposition. It is up to each one of us to assess the quality of those reasons; that is, we must evaluate their evidential force on our own (*Discourse*, 3–21).

Collins is even convinced that we have a *duty* to think for ourselves on all subjects, even when we have previously been denied this right (*Discourse*, iv). Most importantly, this duty applies to “Religious questions” (*Discourse*, 25). Collins names three questions or “matters” of concern, (i) the nature and attributes of God, (ii) the “authority of scriptures”, and (iii) the “sense of scripture” (*Discourse*, 37).<sup>16</sup> If we do not think for ourselves on these religious matters – i. e., if we merely adopt the opinion of an authority figure such as our parents or a priest – then we leave it effectively to chance if we will end up with a correct answer to these weighty questions. But this is insufficient, as Collins stresses; it is of the utmost importance that we do not make mistakes in these matters, given that some “error or mistakes are suppos’d to be damnable” (*Discourse*, 25). That said, he believes mistakes are unproblematic if they are the result of our own free deliberation, because as long as we have tried our best, it will be acceptable to God (*Discourse*, 26). Citing the controversial English churchman William Chillingworth (1602–44), Collins argues that God cannot punish us for having faculties that are insufficient to determine the right opinion on these matters. For these faculties are God-given, and God cannot be “offended with us for not doing, what he knows we cannot do” (*Discourse*, 27).

Following Locke’s dictum that “the chief care of every one ought to be of his own soul first” (*Works* 6: 44), Collins argues it is necessary that we think freely for ourselves about religious matters, since religious authority figures (i. e., the supposed ‘experts’) disagree amongst themselves on even the most fundamental questions. As our salvation may depend on getting the answer right and because

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15 Richard Bentley (1662–1742), the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, attacks this definition as being too broad and essentially meaning “thinking” (*Remarks*, 14–17). In contrast with O’Higgins (1970, 81–83), who agrees with Bentley, I think Uzgalis (2020, § 4.3) is right to point out that there is an important difference between ‘thinking’ and ‘freethinking’. Collins is not concerned with our thought processes in general, but with our thinking *in light of the available evidence* and with our right to consider this evidence without any restrictions (especially as mandated by religious authorities).

16 It remains unclear whether this list is exhaustive. In any case, these are the issues that Collins’ focuses on and presents as the domain of expertise of orthodox Anglican authority figures (i. e., the ‘priests’). It is, then, in relation to these issues that Collins’ tries to undermine the expert status of those ‘priests’. As will become evident in § 4, Berkeley primarily aims defend his (and others) expert status concerning (i) the divine nature and attributes in Alc. 4.16–22.

there is no way to know who is right without considering the available evidence for ourselves, we have thus a duty to think freely about these issues. We cannot be expected by anyone – least of all by the Church and its representatives – to gamble when the stakes are so high.<sup>17</sup>

Although Collins provides additional arguments (cf. *Discourse*, 26–37) for our duty to think freely on the matters of religion he names (cf. *Discourse*, 37), I will restrict the discussion to the argument and issue most relevant to understanding the ‘authority-challenge’. This argument concerns the “conduct of the priests” who are “chief pretenders” when they act as if they could be “guides” when it comes to religious matters such as (i) the question of God’s nature and attributes (*Discourse*, 37).<sup>18</sup>

Collins argues that the priests are unfit to be our guides on religious issues because they are themselves “endlessly divided in opinion about *all these* [religious] matters” (*Discourse*, 37). Therefore, some of them must inevitably defend mistaken – and thus potentially damnable – positions. Given this dissensus, it is in fact a matter of chance if a person ends up with the correct position if they merely adopt it from an ecclesiastical authority figure, without thinking it through for themselves. In the following Collins aims to prove this general point by focusing on the first of the three religious issues he enumerates, viz. the divine nature and attributes. Similar to his procedure in the *Vindication*, Collins starts out by making a historical claim – viz. that there has been disagreement about the nature of God since ancient times. Moreover, there have been disputes among the Church Fathers as well as among the Scholastics (*Discourse*, 37; *Vindication*, 2f.; § 4). While there is more consensus among modern Christian priests about God’s nature because they agree that God is an immaterial being (cf. *Vindication*, 3), there still exists a fundamental disagreement about what it means for God to be an “immaterial being” (*Discourse*, 38). Depending on their positions on this issue, the priests respectively accuse each other of anthropomorphism or atheism. Consequently, Collins argues, even otherwise highly esteemed thinkers such as Samuel Clarke or Ralph Cudworth are called “atheists” (*Discourse*, 37 f.).

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<sup>17</sup> Collins arguably builds on Locke’s argument of the *Four Letters concerning Toleration*. However, in contrast to Locke, he is not concerned with separating church and state by restricting the authority of the “magistrate” over the individual. Rather, Collins wants to restrict the authority the church holds over the individual.

<sup>18</sup> Collins offers nine more instances of priestly conduct (*Discourse*, 42–81), all of which are designed to support his argument that “free-thinking” in matters of religion is unavoidable because one cannot rely on the opinion of the supposed ‘experts’.

Although the disagreement among priests regarding the nature of God is bad, it is even worse with respect to the divine attributes:<sup>19</sup>

As the *Christian priests* differ about the *Nature or Essence of God*, so they are infinitely more divided in their notions about his *Attributes* [...] Indeed the differences among the *priests* in every Church about the *Attributes of God* are as numerous as the *priests* who treat of the *divine attributes*; not one agreeing with another in his notion of them at all. (*Discourse*, 39).

Among all these differences, there is one Collins deems “most remarkable” (*Discourse*, 40). This disagreement concerns the sense in which attributions to God are to be understood. As Collins notes, the Bible is full of attributions of body parts and passions to God. However, these are not to be taken in “a proper and just sense, but improperly, or as the *schools* speak, *analogically*” (*Discourse*, 40). For example, God has neither a body nor parts; rather, these attributions must be understood as meaning that God has the ‘power’ to do things for which humans necessarily need certain body parts. According to Collins, while everyone agrees that these are instances of an analogical *and* improper way of speaking about God, disagreement nonetheless resurfaces when it comes to attributions denoting *perfections* such as “understand[ing], wisdom, will, goodness, holiness, justice and truth” (*Discourse*, 40). Collins mentions the former Archbishop of Canterbury – John Tillotson (1630–94) – who maintains that these attributes are to be understood “strictly and properly, or in their common sense” (*Discourse*, 40). This view is then contrasted with William King’s position (*Discourse*, 41 f.).<sup>20</sup>

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**19** Collins’ distinction between divine nature and attributes may seem surprising at first sight because it seems as if knowledge about the divine attributes would tell us what God’s nature is like. But it makes sense considering that Collins (historically justifiable) believes that each issue is a separate topic of discussion relating to different problems. For instance, the discussion about the divine attributes concerns issues such as what attributes does God have and in what sense are they to be understood, while the issue of God’s nature concerns questions such as whether God is immaterial or not (*Discourse*, 37–42). I thank an anonymous referee for drawing this apparent tension to my attention.

**20** It is important to note that mentioning Tillotson further tightens the (implicit) connection between the *Vindication* and the *Discourse*. Since a quote from Tillotson is featured prominently on the title page of the *Vindication* and Collins uses the exact same quote in the *Discourse* (40). In the quoted passage Tillotson argues that we need to have a proper notion of the divine attributes, or we will end up with an empty notion of God, which is precisely the line of criticism Collins’ develops at length in the *Vindication*. Considering that this criticism is also prefaced with a lengthy historical story about the disagreements on the issue of the divine nature and attributes, it seems reasonable to assume that any reader of both works would see that the AD is applicable to the *Vindication* as well. I thank an anonymous referee suggesting this additional line of development to me.

While Collins does not repeat the charge that King's position is compatible with atheism, his presentation of the latter does put additional pressure on orthodox Anglican authority figures to refute it. According to Collins, this position conflicts with the first of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, which is concerned with the religious matter of God's nature and attributes. The article states that God is "without body parts or passions" yet possesses "infinite power, wisdom and goodness." However, Collins argues that, on King's view, wisdom and goodness are on the same footing as body parts and passions (first problem) inasmuch as they are not properly *in* God (second problem). Thus, Collins' presentation implies that an *Anglican Archbishop's* notion of the divine nature and attributes are incompatible with the fundamental principles of Anglicanism.<sup>21</sup>

## 4 Collins' 'Authority-Challenge'

In this section I reconstruct Collins' 'authority-challenge', which is based on his arguments in the *Vindication* and the *Discourse*. In the *Vindication* Collins criticizes King's position as advancing a notion of God that is acceptable to atheists and allows them to hide their true persuasion. Since orthodox authority figures of the Anglican church are in the very least committed to God's existence, Collins puts pressure on the former to refute King's position. This pressure is further accentuated when Collins argues that King's position is incompatible with fundamental tenets of Anglicanism and in particular with the first of the *Thirty-Nine-Articles of Religion*, which concerns the religious issue of God's nature and attributes.

At first sight, it may seem like refuting King's position *per se* does not represent a major challenge since there are alternative interpretations of the divine nature and attributes (cf. Browne's *Procedure*). Collins even mentions another option – viz. to understand the divine attributes in a literal sense (*Vindication*, 4, 12, 14, and 23).<sup>22</sup> The true extent and exact nature of the problem Collins creates

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<sup>21</sup> Thus, as far as page 42 of the *Discourse* is concerned (to which Berkeley refers in a footnote), Berkeley's charge from § 6 of the *Theory of Vision Vindicated* that Collins insinuates his atheism there cannot be substantiated. I believe this indicates that we ought to be more careful in counting Berkeley's *conviction* that Collins was an atheist as "external evidence" that this was *actually* the case (cf. Berman 2013, 72–74). Especially since this reading of Collins was not unanimously accepted in Berkeley's immediate surroundings. For example, Browne does not charge Collins with atheism; rather, he describes him as an "Antagonist, who writes with less shew of Zeal indeed for the Cause of Christianity, but better colour of Reason" (*Procedure*, 20).

<sup>22</sup> It is beyond the scope of my paper to investigate whether Collins *endorses* this position or rather just *mentions* it. While Uzgalis (2020: § 4.2) argues for the former, such an interpretation is rejected by several commentators (Berman 1988, 82–88; Taranto 2000, 260–63; Agnesina, 2018,

becomes evident, however, when we consider the AD. In a nutshell, the AD states that one is free to reason for oneself on any issue where experts *substantively disagree*. In his *Discourse*, Collins applies the AD to matters of religion which Collins takes to concern the divine nature and attributes as well as the authority and meaning of the (holy) scriptures. The discussion of King's position takes place amid Collins' effort to prove that freethinking in matters of religion is necessary because the supposed experts (i. e., orthodox Anglican ecclesiastical authority figures) *substantively disagree* about God's nature and the divine attributes. In fact, when it comes to the divine attributes, they advance almost diametrically opposed positions (*Discourse*, 37–42). Inevitably, then, some of them must be advancing a thoroughly mistaken opinion and consequently they cannot be our guides in this religious matter. Since if you do not think for yourself, you have what is effectively a 50 % chance of getting it right, depending on whether you are lucky enough to have picked the divines who advance the correct opinion. Considering that your salvation may depend on getting the right answer, it would be highly irresponsible to gamble when the stakes are so high and thus you owe it to yourself to think freely on this matter.

Collins' piecemeal tactic suggests that his AD taken together with his criticisms of King in the *Vindication* and the *Discourse* are designed to challenge the authority of orthodox Anglican (ecclesiastical) figures as experts on matters of religion. On the one hand Collins raises a political problem for these figures because their position forces them to combat any form of unbelief. And considering how King's view can be used to spread one of the worst forms of unbelief, viz., atheism, these figures are left with no choice but to refute King's position. On the other hand, Collins creates a dialectical problem for anyone who wishes to argue against King. If the AD is not addressed, any form of disagreement will prove Collins' point about the inability of priests and other orthodox Anglican authority figures to be reliable guides in matters of religion. To anyone who takes the AD seriously arguing against King concerning a matter of religion (viz., the divine nature and attributes) comes at the cost of losing one's status as an expert on the issue in question. Since a substantive disagreement is all that is needed to secure the right to think freely about it. Thus, a reaction like Browne's, who does not address the AD and substantively disagrees with King, provides another case in point to anyone familiar with the AD.<sup>23</sup>

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ch. 4). Collins seems to remain deliberately vague – going as far as to indicate that he would sympathise with a rectified version of King's position (*Vindication*, 24).

**23** It is an interesting question whether Browne deliberately ignored Collins' AD or if he failed to see the issues it raised because he was primarily focused on the *Vindication* and not on the *Discourse*. For more on Browne's position, cf. Pearce 2020.

In other words: Collins' argument puts a price tag on the authority of orthodox Anglican ecclesiastical figures. Since the challenge, implicitly, raises the question how much these figures value their status as experts on matters of religion and the (political) power that comes with this expert status (cf. note 6). Are they willing to sacrifice both to solve the political problem that atheism poses, or do they leave the door open to atheism to salvage it? Interestingly, their authority as experts on matters of religion will suffer anyway. If they refute King, they will sacrifice their status as experts on matters of religion to keep atheism in check for now. But they open the door to more widespread disbelief because people are now allowed to think freely and embrace whatever opinion that leads to, including atheism. But if they choose to remain silent, it would create the impression that they are more concerned with their status as religious experts and their (political) power than actually promoting proper faith in God and in particular God's existence. This in turn would strengthen Collins' point that the "priests" are "chief pretenders" (*Discourse*, 37) who "have no interest to lead me to true opinions, but only to the opinions they have listed themselves to profess, and for the most part into mistaken opinions" (*Discourse*, 90). This display of hypocrisy would also raise the question why anyone should care what these authority figures have to say on religious matters such as the divine nature and attributes in the first place.

As far as the authority of orthodox Anglican ecclesiastical figures is concerned the challenge Collins construes seems to amount to a dilemma. *As long as the AD is not addressed* there is seemingly no way to react to the challenge, without undermining one's authority on religious issues one way or another. While attacking the AD would be a philosophically valid strategy, there is at least one orthodox Anglican authority figure, who deems this to be insufficient.<sup>24</sup> That is, there is someone who takes Collins' 'authority-challenge' seriously the way Collins sets it up and tries to meet it in a way that keeps atheism in check without undermining his authority on the issue in question: George Berkeley. He argues that what seems like a *substantive* disagreement about a religious matter, viz. the attributes and nature of God, is actually the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding of a non-religious matter (viz., the correct interpretation of the Scholastic terms 'analogy' and 'analogical').

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<sup>24</sup> This is partly explained by Berkeley's worry that freethinkers develop into atheists (*Works* III, 23–25) and that they are seducing the youth (*Alc.* 2.20), "[t]heir [i. e., the freethinkers] application to the young and ignorant is dangerous" (*Alc.* 2.19). Thus, in *Alciphron* Berkeley often argues against the freethinkers on their own terms, arguably hoping that this would render his refutations of freethinking more convincing (cf. Jones 2021, 209). Since it helps to display, what Berkeley perceived to be, the hypocrisy of the freethinkers (cf. Berman 1993, 10).

## 5 Berkeley's *Alciphron* as a Reaction to Collins' 'Authority-Challenge'

The aim of this section is to solve an interpretive problem facing Berkeley scholars with respect to §§ 16–22 of the fourth dialogue in Berkeley's *Alciphron*. Berkeley's response in §§ 16–22, I argue, is designed to meet Collins' 'authority-challenge'. That is, Berkeley tries to refute King's position on the divine nature and attributes to keep atheism in check, without running afoul of Collins' AD and consequently without undermining his own authority as an expert on the issue.

*Alciphron* was conceived as an apologetic work, meant to defend Christianity against "those who are called Free-Thinkers" (*Works* III, 22), whose convictions Berkeley calls "the principle root or source [...] of most evils in this age" (Letter 209, 336). It consists of seven fictitious dialogues between two freethinkers, Alciphron and Lysicles, as well as Berkeley's two spokespeople Euphranor and Crito, as narrated by a fifth and mostly silent participant, Dion, to his friend Theages (*Alc.* 1.1). In §§ 1–15 of the fourth dialogue, Berkeley uses his thesis that vision is the language of God (cf. *Alc.* 4.14 f.; *NTV* § 147; *TVV* §§ 38–40), to develop a proof of God's existence designed to convince freethinkers (*Alc.* 4.1–3).<sup>25</sup>

Berkeley's attempt to prove the existence of God on conditions acceptable to freethinkers sets the stage for the freethinker Diagoras, who is generally accepted to stand in for Collins in this dialogue, to interject.<sup>26</sup> After Alciphron is forced to concede that God exists (*Alc.* 4.15), the second freethinker, Lysicles, comes to his rescue (*Alc.* 4.16). He contends that "the being of God is a point in itself of small consequence, and a man may make this concession without yielding much" (*Alc.* 4.16). Here, the highly esteemed Diagoras (i. e., Collins) has discovered a way to pay lip service to God's existence while retaining what amounts, in effect, to an atheistic conviction (*Alc.* 4.16). As Lysicles puts it in his recapitulation of Diagoras' discovery: "And not to be singular we will use the name [i. e., 'God'] too, and

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Airaksinen/Gylling 2017. More on the so-called 'divine language argument', its importance and best interpretation can be found in: Kline 1987; Fields 2011, 213–19; Fasko 2021, ch. 4; Pearce 2017, ch. 9. For a recent, concise discussion of the secondary literature on the divine language argument in particular and of theological issues more generally, cf. Blechl 2019, 125–28.

<sup>26</sup> This is generally accepted for good reasons. For example, Berkeley implies that Diagoras has found a "demonstration" to prove that there is no God (*Alc.* 4.16). According to Berkeley's American friend Samuel Johnson, Berkeley said the same about Collins (cf. Johnson [1929], § 31, 26; cf. Berman 1994, 163–66). Furthermore, Berkeley charges Collins' with atheism (*Siris* § 354) and of using, what Toland calls, a "two-fold doctrine" (*Tetradymus*, 65) in his *Discourse* to insinuate his atheism (*TVV* § 6).

so at once there is an end of atheism” (*Alc.* 4.18). However, it becomes evident in §§ 17–18 that this “end of atheism” is only a nominal one.

In § 17, entitled “Opinion of some who hold that knowledge and wisdom are not properly in God” (*Works* III, 27), Lysicles explains how Diagoras discovered that the “most profound and speculative divines” endorsed the opinion that ‘knowledge’, ‘wisdom’, ‘goodness’, etc. “must be understood in a quite different sense” when they are attributed to God (*Alc.* 4.17; cf. *Sermon* § 7 and *Vindication*, 8). Diagoras realizes that this conception of divine attribution is compatible with atheism because it renders God “an unknown being”. According to Diagoras, saying that God is ‘analogically’ wise, good, etc. is tantamount to denying that God has these attributes at all (*Alc.* 4.17; cf. *Vindication*, 12f.). On this view, then, one must give up the “point in dispute between theist and atheist” – viz., whether the first cause of things is a “thinking and intelligent being” (*Alc.* 4.18; cf. *Vindication*, 14).

This is why Berkeley believes the notion that wisdom or knowledge “are not properly in God” has a “dangerous tendency” (*Works* III, 27). Berkeley interpreted the *Vindication* as a disguised explanation of how one can hide one’s atheism. According to Berkeley’s presentation, the whole point of Diagoras’ discovery is to provide a way for atheists to speak *as if* they believed in (a theistically conceived) God. Thus, it is unsurprising that Berkeley – who from the outset devoted his work to fighting scepticism, atheism, and irreligion (*Works* II, 20; VI, 69f., 79, 84) – felt that he *had* to react to the *Vindication*. From Berkeley’s perspective, King’s position has not only opened a door to atheism, it has already allowed one atheist (viz., Collins) to burst through.

In his rebuttal of Diagoras (i. e., Collins) in §§ 19–22, Berkeley arguably displays a full willingness to meet Collins’ ‘authority-challenge’ head on. This becomes evident when Berkeley begins by introducing his second spokesman, Crito, who remarks that an empty notion of God is not new to him: “I remember not long since to have heard a minute philosopher<sup>27</sup> triumph upon this very point; which put me on inquiring what foundation there was for it in the Fathers and Schoolmen” (*Alc.* 4.19). Berkeley’s Crito locates the origin of the idea that there could be an empty notion of God in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita which in turn, Berkeley claims, heavily influenced the scholastic Pico della Mirandola (*Alc.* 4.19).

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27 Throughout *Alciphron*, Berkeley refers to the freethinkers as “minute philosophers”. This is an ironic play on words. The freethinkers consider themselves “minute” in virtue of their meticulous attention to detail, whereas Berkeley suggests they are ‘minute’ since they “diminish all valuable things” (*Alc.* 1.11).



According to Berkeley, both writers agree in that it seems at first sight *as if* they were endorsing an empty notion of God, and in that sense, they can be seen as the “original” of the “opinion [...] that knowledge and wisdom are not properly in God” as well as the “dangerous tendency of this notion” (*Works* III, 27). Berkeley hastens to put these writings in perspective, however. He stresses that Pseudo-Dionysius, “despite the *harshness of his expression* [my emphasis]”, nonetheless affirms “over and over” that God knows all things. Berkeley also draws attention to the fact (well established by then) that Pseudo-Dionysius is an “apocryphal writer” anyway. Berkeley recalls that the *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Divine Names* were not actually written by Dionysius the Areopagite, second Bishop of Athens, who is believed to have been converted by the apostle Paul in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Rather, they were written sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century and their anonymous author chose this pseudonym referring to the church-father.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Berkeley concludes that “it should seem very weak and rash in a Christian to adopt this *harsh language* [my emphasis]” and, furthermore, to give it precedence over the Bible. Even Pico, who “*speaks as the apocryphal Dionysius* [my emphasis]”, does not mean to “deprive God of Knowledge” – which becomes evident whenever he explains himself (*Alc.* 4.19). Berkeley closes § 19 by stating that the “Schoolmen” respected the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, but “they rejected or softened his harsh expressions, and explained away or reduced his doctrine to the received notions taken from the Holy Scripture and the light of nature” (*Alc.* 4.19).

There are two points to note here that play a crucial role for Berkeley’s attempt to reject King in accordance with the restrictions Collins’ argument imposes. First, contrary to Collins (cf. *Discourse*, 37–42; *Vindication*, 2f.) Berkeley implies there are “received notions”, i. e., positions shared by (virtually) everyone when it comes to the nature of God and the divine attributes.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Berkeley entitles the next section, “The sense of Schoolmen upon it [i. e., “the opinion [...] that

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**28** This was not unusual to do at the time. The author made use of a well-established rhetorical tool called ‘declamation’, in which one adopts the name of a person from the New Testament or a church-father. This is usually done with the purpose of highlighting one’s indebtedness and commitment to a certain (interpretative) tradition.

**29** A similar approach can be found as early as 1713, in Bentley’s *Remarks*. Bentley aims to undermine the historical foundation of Collins’ position by attacking him for his lack of foreign language skills and for his faulty translations of authors like Cicero (*Remarks*, 15, 52–58; cf. O’Higgins 1970, 79–85). In this way, he “killed” the *Discourse*’s success in Britain and Ireland. However, Bentley was unable to offer anything substantial to counter Collins’ observation of disagreement – especially in the Anglican Church – and in this way fails to reject the AD (O’Higgins 1970, 92; Taranto 2000, 143–46). Berkeley arguably aims to rectify this oversight and to develop an argument that can convince someone who takes the AD seriously. That is, similarly to his proof of God he offers an argument on the freethinkers’ own terms (*Alc.* 4.3).

knowledge and wisdom are not properly in God”]” (*Works* III, 27). When he opens the next section with a brief discussion of Aquinas, Berkeley, unsurprisingly, presents Thomas’ position as an illustration of an unanimously held opinion (*Alc.* 4.20).

Second, according to Berkeley’s presentation, there has been no *substantive* disagreement between Pseudo-Dionysius’ and the scholastics. Rather than refuting Pseudo-Dionysius’ position, the scholastics merely reject the latter’s *way of speaking*, and they even demonstrate how the content of the doctrine is compatible with the “received notions” (*Alc.* 4.19), i. e., the standard position on the divine nature and attributes. Berkeley’s use of Pico in that context is especially telling. Since what Berkeley implies in this way is that *not even* a heterodox thinker like Pico – whose works have been banned by the church – rejects this standard position.<sup>30</sup> In other words: Berkeley maintains that Pseudo-Dionysius can be plausibly understood as the origin of the notion that “knowledge and wisdom are not properly in God” (*Works* III, 27). And although it sometimes *sounds as if* Pseudo-Dionysius or Pico are deviating from the standard position, Berkeley is careful to stress that this is not actually the case.

At first sight this seems to be a promising strategy to solve the problem that King’s position poses as well. Berkeley could just continue his ‘narrative of agreement’. That is, his story that there never has been any substantive disagreement on the religious matter of the divine nature and attributes ever since the Church fathers. This would require showing that King’s position is also an instance where it simply *sounds as if* the latter is embracing an empty notion of God. Interestingly, this is not what Berkeley does.

When the freethinker Lysicles claims (in a rebuttal of Crito’s elaborations in §§ 19–21) that he is “confident some author or other has maintained the fore-mentioned notion [of God] in the same sense as Diagoras related it” (*Alc.* 4.22), Berkeley’s Crito admits this to be the case.<sup>31</sup> Berkeley, thus, freely owns that King advances a mistaken opinion. As will become evident next, however, he argues that this has no bearing on his (or others) expert status for matters of religion because it does not concern the religious issue at hand. Instead, Berkeley aims to demonstrate that King makes an exegetical mistake concerning a non-religious issue and consequently endorses the wrong opinion for a (philosophically) poor reason. According to Berkeley’s presentation King does not offer an argument for

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<sup>30</sup> For more on Pico’s works and their reception, cf. Copenhaver 2020, § 2.

<sup>31</sup> Although Berkeley seems also keen to stress that King’s mistake is an isolated incident, when he is adamant that this “never was a received notion, and never will [be], so long as men believe a God” (*Alc.* 4.22).

his position that one could engage and disagree with, but he simply misunderstands and hence misapplies the standard opinion concerning the metaphysics of analogy.

Berkeley's attempt to shift King's mistake away from the religious question concerning the nature of God and the divine attributes becomes already evident in the title of § 21: "Scholastic use of the terms Analogy and Analogical explained: analogical perfections in God misunderstood" (*Works* III, 27). In § 20 he introduced Suárez to highlight the importance of analogies for our speaking of God's nature and the divine attributes such as "knowledge or will". Berkeley also maintains that Suárez already articulated the commonly held belief that we can only conceive of the divine nature and attributes "by analogy only to created beings" (*Alc.* 4.20).

Berkeley's point in § 21 is that someone like King, "very much misunderstood and misapplied" the metaphysics of analogy, when he maintained (*Sermon* §§ 7 and 13) that we cannot have a proper notion of divine "knowledge or wisdom" or "understand any more of them than one born blind can of light and colours" (*Alc.* 4.21). The solution to this problem is not to engage with King's position or his arguments for it, but to simply provide him (and others endorsing a similar position) with an apparently much needed clarification. As Berkeley stresses in the opening of § 21:

But, to prevent any man's being led, by mistaking the scholastic use of the term *analogy* and *analogical*, into an opinion we cannot frame in any degree a true proper notion of attributes applied by analogy, or, in the school phrase, predicated analogically, it may not be amiss to inquire into the true sense and meaning of those words [my emphasis]. (*Alc.* 4.21).

Berkeley proceeds to clarify those terms. Referencing Caietanus' *De Nominum analogia* he argues that an analogy is an "equality of proportions" and that we can use them to attribute anything to God "proportionably". That is, we can attribute them in a way that preserves "a proportion to the infinite nature of God" (*Alc.* 4.21). We can speak of God in the "same sense" as we speak of humans (*Alc.* 4.22) and use the words which are needed to describe God in their proper meaning, as long as the attribute we ascribe to God "simply, or as such" does not imply a defect (*Alc.* 4.21). This allows us to gain (positive) knowledge about God's attributes and nature. As Berkeley puts it: "We may [...] affirm that all sorts of perfection which we can conceive in a finite spirit are in God, but without any of that alloy which is found in creatures" (*Alc.* 4.21).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Thus, it seems that Berkeley is spelling out in § 21 the position he attributes to Suárez in § 20 in more detail. Berkeley stresses that the latter holds that even being can only be "attributed

To recap: in line with King Berkeley admits that we must use analogies to speak about God, but he rejects the idea that this will lead to an empty notion of God. On the contrary, Berkeley argues that we can gain positive knowledge about God by using analogies. He is careful, however, to point out that this does not hold for *any* kind of analogy. Referring to Caietanus again, Berkeley claims that there is a standardly made distinction between “metaphorical and proper” analogies. While the latter allow one to speak literal and properly, the former are “merely metaphorical”. When, for instance, God is “represented as having a finger” this does not mean that God actually has body parts. Rather, speaking of “the finger of God” is meant to illustrate that a certain event “is as truly ascribed to God as the works wrought by human fingers to man” (*Alc.* 4.21).<sup>33</sup>

This clarification of analogies in general and the distinction between proper and metaphorical one’s in particular is important to understand the mistake Berkeley attributes to King. Since King and Berkeley not only agree that analogies are crucial to speak about God, but their notions of analogy also look very similar. King equates ‘analogy’ and ‘proportion’ (*Sermon* § 8–9, 11, 20) and agrees with Berkeley that attributing body parts such as hands to God just means that God has “a Power to execute all those Acts, to the effecting of which these Parts in us are instrumental” (*Sermon* § 5). According to Berkeley’s presentation, King’s critical mistake, however, is to overlook the distinction between metaphorical and proper analogies. The reason King ends up with an empty notion of God is that he treats all analogical claims about God as if they were “merely metaphorical” (*Alc.* 4.21).

This way of identifying King’s mistake allows Berkeley to refute King’s position without undermining his authority as an expert on religious matter at hand. The whole thrust of Berkeley’s argument in § 21 can be spelled out as follows: King does not offer an argument or philosophically interesting reason for endors-

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analogically” to God. Yet, this is not because God does not properly exist, but because “He exists in a more eminent and perfect manner” (*Alc.* 4.20). While Berkeley does not indicate how exactly he uses “eminent” here, Taranto has analysed Berkeley’s usage in light of the one’s by Aquinas as well as Suárez and suggested that Berkeley means it in the sense of “infinitely more powerful” (Taranto, 2020, 8). In other words, Berkeley presents himself, once again, as advancing the same notion as Aquinas and Suárez before him.

**33** Moreover, the introduction of this distinction is important because it shows that Berkeley believes the issue of the divine attributes and nature cannot be neatly separated from the other two religious issues Collins’ names. Since this distinction also helps Berkeley to defend the “authority of scriptures” by demonstrating the different “sense[s] of scripture” (*Discourse*, 37) when it comes to the issue of God’s nature and the divine attributes and by providing a way to keep them apart. For more on Berkeley’s position and the issue of divine analogy, cf.: Curtin 2014, 611–15; Daniel 2011, 155–56; Fasko 2018, 41–47; O’Higgins 1976, 94–99.

ing an empty notion of God. His endorsement merely rests on a *fundamental* misunderstanding of a non-religious issue concerning the metaphysics of analogy and it can be rectified with a simple clarification. Berkeley suggests that pointing out the difference between proper and metaphorical analogies is all that it takes for King or someone like him to stop advancing an empty notion of God.

But is Berkeley's attempt to meet Collins' challenge this way successful? For two reasons it is certainly questionable whether it is. On the one hand it is unclear whether Collins' challenge is as narrow as Berkeley construes it. On the other hand is the fact that Berkeley's 'narrative of agreement' and of a standard doctrine concerning the metaphysics of analogy rest on a rather idiosyncratic reading of the Scholastics and on omitting important viewpoints.

Straightforwardly, Collins' claim seems to be that whenever the supposed experts *substantively* disagree on a *matter of religion* (viz. the nature of God and the divine attributes as well as the sense and meaning of the scriptures), anyone is free to reason for themselves, with respect to this matter. Berkeley's argument aims to establish that the experts have not *substantively* disagreed about the divine nature and attributes. There is merely a *substantive* disagreement about the correct interpretation and application of the standard position concerning the metaphysics of analogy between King and everyone else. Berkeley arguably wants to claim that this disagreement has no bearing on the right to think freely about the divine nature and attributes. If it gives any permission at all this disagreement would allow to think freely about the metaphysics of analogy. *Strictly speaking*, this is not a matter of religion, however, and consequently has no bearing on Berkeley's (or anyone else's) status as a religious expert. Yet, it is unclear if he is really entitled to this claim *if* he takes Collins' AD seriously. Since Collins, in turn, would arguably contend that his AD is, on a closer look, not as narrow as Berkeley presented it in discussing the divine nature and attributes. Collins could consistently claim that the AD does not only hold for the issues of religion he names, but also for any non-religious matter with a bearing on these – such as the metaphysics of analogy and its correct interpretation. If the supposed experts disagree about the interpretation, we are allowed to reason freely about the metaphysics of analogy and thus about something that is a prerequisite to arrive at the 'correct' notion of God. However, Collins could justifiably ask: if we are free to reason about the premise, why not also about the conclusion? Collins could say that it seems arbitrary and inconsistent to allow the one and to deny the other. Since he believes that each kind of "*science or art*" is connected to the others and that knowledge in one cannot be obtained "without knowledge of the other *arts and sciences*" (*Discourse* 5 f.). This, of course, includes the "sublimest of all sciences, *Theology*" (*Discourse*, 9). Collins holds that any restraint in "*any science or any part of science*" will lead to ignorance "so far as the *restraint* goes"

(*Discourse*, 5) and asserts that thinking freely “upon all human *sciences*” is the only possible way to master them to perfection (*Discourse*, 9). Consequently, Berkeley’s concession of substantial disagreement would suffice for Collins even though it does not concern a religious issue, strictly speaking, anymore.<sup>34</sup>

Second, Collins argues that we are free to reason for ourselves when it comes to the divine nature and attributes because there has been *substantive* disagreement about this issue since the earliest days of Christianity. Against this, Berkeley argues there has been a standard doctrine of analogy ever since Christian philosophers have thought about the issue. From today’s point of view Collins’ narrative seems clearly more contextually accurate. Since Berkeley’s presentation of the authors which he considers comes at the cost of not discussing ways in which Aquinas for instance departs from Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>35</sup> Even more importantly, Berkeley fails to mention the famous debate between Scotists and Thomists about how best to describe the nature and attributes of God, which arguably rests to a significant extent on their differing views concerning the metaphysics of analogy. This is all the more significant considering that Berkeley was in all likelihood aware of this debate (cf. *Works* VII, 286) and because the position he argues for seems much closer to Scotism than the Thomist tradition he presents himself as endorsing.<sup>36</sup> While it makes sense that Berkeley does not address the issue of Scotism because it would undermined his narrative of agreement, his failure to do so may be seen as a sign that he realised himself that he overemphasized the agreement. Berkeley would have arguably had no issue with his inaccuracy, however, because it serves a greater good: his lifelong fight against atheism and irreligion.

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**34** I want to express my gratitude to an anonymous referee whose valuable suggestions were immensely helpful in framing this point.

**35** Most importantly, Thomas was not a proponent of negative theology when it comes to the divine attributes, but had a “positive theology of the divine names” (Rocca 2004, ch. 10). That is, in contrast to Pseudo-Dionysius Thomas does not only believe that we can say what God is not. Rather he thinks it is possible to speak positively (*affirmative*) of God and the divine attributes (cf. e. g. ST I<sup>a</sup> q. 13 a. 2; SG I c. 30). A comprehensive study of Pseudo-Dionysius influence on Aquinas metaphysics more generally can be found in O’Rourke 1992.

**36** I have considered the extent of Berkeley’s ‘Scotism’ in more detail along with the idiosyncrasies in his interpretation of Caietanus (cf. Fasko 2018, esp. §§ 4–5; Hochschild 2004). A more exhaustive reading of Berkeley’s (partly flawed) interpretation of Aquinas is found in: March 1942. For a more extensive discussion of the debate between Thomists and Scotists in general, and with respect to the problem of divine attributes in particular, cf. Arieu 2011, 77–84, or Smith 2013.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

My primary aim in this paper has been to use the insight about Collins' piecemeal tactics to reconstruct a hitherto underappreciated argument, which I have termed the 'authority-challenge'. When taken together, Collins' criticisms of King in his *Vindication* (cf. Section 2) as well as in the *Discourse* and the AD he develops in the latter work (cf. Section 3) give rise to the following challenge: King endorses an empty notion of God, which is compatible with atheism. Thus, any orthodox Anglican (ecclesiastical) figure ought to be interested in refuting King. However, they seemingly cannot do that without undermining their authority as experts on religious matters. Since Collins argues that whenever the supposed experts *substantively* disagree on a matter of religion such as God's nature and the divine attributes, any person is free to reason for themselves about the issue at hand. On the other hand, it is also impossible for them to remain silent because that would open the door to atheism and make these authority figures look hypocritical because they would fail to meet their (political) commitment to fight any form of irreligion. This hypocrisy would, in turn, raise the question why their opinion on religious matters should be considered in the first place (cf. Section 4).

In addition to shedding light on a hitherto underappreciated argument by Collins, the main upshot of my reconstruction is that it provides us with a means for solving the problem that Berkeley's *Alc.* 4.16–22 so far has posed for scholars (cf. Section 5). I suggested that Berkeley's argumentative strategy along with his puzzling references to historical authors such as Pico make sense if these sections are read as an attempt to respond to Collins' challenge on the latter's own terms. On my reading, Berkeley aims to meet the 'authority-challenge' by doing two things. First, he aims to undermine Collins' claim that the experts have always disagreed about God's nature and the divine attributes. Instead, he presents a 'narrative of agreement', in which there may have been discussions about the best way to express certain things, but *no substantive* disagreement about the issue at hand or the doctrine of analogy on which its discussions rests. Second, Berkeley tries to refute King's position without *substantively* disagreeing with him *about the religious issue* of the divine nature and attributes, and, therefore, without undermining his status as an expert on the issue. Berkeley does so by arguing that King's position is the result of an unfortunate, and rather isolated, misunderstanding of a doctrine concerning the metaphysics of analogy which has been shared by virtually anyone since the Church fathers. According to Berkeley's presentation rejecting King's position does not require philosophical engagement (since there are no arguments to engage with), but merely a clarification of 'analogy' and 'analogical' – and of the difference between proper and metaphorical analogies in particular.

Thus, at first sight Berkeley finds a way to meet Collins' challenge. However, as I pointed out in my closing remarks there are at least two reasons for doubting whether Berkeley is entirely successful in this endeavour: (i) the intended scope of Collins' challenge and (ii) Berkeley's idiosyncratic interpretation of the scholastic sources.<sup>37</sup>

Alc.	Berkeley's <i>Alciphron</i>
Discourse	Collins' <i>A Discourse of Free-thinking</i>
NTV	Berkeley's <i>New Theory of Vision</i>
Procedure	Browne's <i>The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding</i>
Remarks	Bentley's <i>Remarks Upon a Discourse of Free-Thinking</i>
SG	Thomas' <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ST	Thomas' <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
Sermon	King's sermon on <i>Divine Predestination and Foreknowledge, Consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will</i>
TVV	Berkeley's <i>Theory of Vision Vindicated</i>
Vindication	Collins' <i>A Vindication of the Divine Attributes</i>
Works I–IX	<i>The Works of George Berkeley</i>
Works 1–10	<i>The Works of John Locke.</i>

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