

The important question about analogy, so far as theistic metaphysics is concerned, is whether the distinction between literal (nonsymbolic) and symbolic (nonliteral) kinds of meaning is exhaustive, or whether there is yet a third, analogical kind of meaning that certain terms may have that cannot be simply identified with, or reduced to, either of the other kinds. My position is that the distinction is exhaustive, and that any supposedly third, analogical kind of meaning that terms may have can be simply identified with, or reduced to, either the literal or the symbolic kind, depending on the sense in which “analogy” and its cognates are understood. If they are understood in the broad, general sense in which they are ordinarily used, the kind of meaning so-called analogical terms have can be reduced to, if not simply identified with, the symbolic kind. If, on the contrary, “analogy” and its cognates are understood in the stricter, more specific sense explicated by a theory of analogy, i.e., in terms of the threefold distinction between “univocal,” “equivocal,” and “analogical,” the kind of meaning so-called analogical terms have can be reduced to, if not simply identified with, the literal kind.

By its very logic, any transcendental term other than “God” can—and, if theism is intelligible, must—be used in two infinitely different senses, each of which is literal. In being so used, however, the term does not lose but retains the same literal sense it has in any of its uses as a transcendental term. Thus if “existence,” for example, is just such a term, then, on any of its uses, to say that something exists means literally that the essence of the thing is somehow actualized, in some actual, and therefore necessarily contingent, state. Nor can this same literal meaning ever fail^{to} be retained on any use of “existence” if it is to be used intelligibly. At the same time, this literal meaning of the term allows for—and, again, if theism is intelligible, requires—its use in both of two infinitely different senses, each of which is also literal, i.e., the sense in which it applies to all existents other than God, which exist and can exist, contingently, on some conditions, only; and the sense in which it applies solely to the unique existent God, which alone exists and must exist necessarily, on all conditions whatever. So, too, with the other transcendental term “individual.” For anything at all to be a concrete individual, as distinct from a mere ideal or abstraction, it must be literally related somehow both to itself and to others comparably concrete. And “individual” can lose this literal meaning only by no longer

being used intelligibly. Still, this literal meaning itself allows for—and, yet again, if theism is true, requires—the term’s being used in two infinitely different senses, both of which are likewise literal, i.e., the sense in which it applies to all the many particular individuals that are literally related to self and others only partially and inadequately; and the sense in which it applies solely to the one universal individual called “God,” whose self- and other-relations are just as literally impartial and wholly adequate.

But if terms held to be used analogically in this stricter, more specific sense must, by their very logic, also be used literally in both of the respects thus explained, then, clearly their meaning is reducible to, whether or not it is simply identified with, the literal kind of meaning.

If, on the other hand, terms are held to be used analogically only in the broad, general sense in which “analogy” and its cognates are ordinarily used, their meaning cannot be different in kind from that of any other terms—whether “metaphors,” “images,” “figures,” or what not—that obviously have a symbolic kind of meaning. To be sure, not all terms having such meaning need be, in all other respects, of simply the same kind. To say, for example, “The Lord is my shepherd” or “A mighty fortress is our God” is clearly a vivid way of speaking, in the primary context of theistic faith and witness, of the loving care of God or of God’s utter reliability. But both of these expressions, also—“loving care” and “utter reliability”—are themselves symbolic ways of speaking, even though, arguably, the interpersonal symbols they employ arise from a another deeper, more religiously relevant stratum of human experience than that disclosing either shepherding sheep or constructing military fortifications. Nor is it in principle any different if the symbols employed allegedly refer to certain “pure perfections” that—so the argument goes—are better for any being to have than not to have and that God therefore, as the unsurpassable being, has to have in an eminent sense. Thus “mind” or “experience” is said to refer to just such a pure perfection, once its meaning is so generalized as to refer no longer to any specific kind of mind or experience but only to what is called “mind in general” or “experience as such.” The profound difficulty with such reasoning, however, is that all such phrases are, for all anyone has

shown to the contrary, merely verbal, if not subtly self-contradictory, in somewhat the same way as “the greatest possible number.” The plain truth of the matter is that obviously categorial terms such as “mind” or “experience” cannot be intelligibly employed as though they were the transcendental terms that they most certainly are not. For they clearly do not retain the same literal sense in any of their uses, nor are their senses when applied either to God or to beings other than God literal senses, unless, of course, the only intelligible, more than merely verbal, meaning that can be claimed for them is really only that of the literal transcendental terms that they and all other uses of language necessarily presuppose.

But these difficulties with obviously symbolic uses of terms pretending to some third kind of “analogical” meaning I have discussed at length in other places (cf., especially, *The Point of Christology*: 127-147; *Doing Theology Today*: 187-209). All that needs to be said here is that the kind of meaning that all such terms have, insofar as they have any meaning at all, is reducible to, even if it is not to be simply identified with, that of symbolic uses of terms generally.

The conclusion, then, is clear: the only kinds of meaning involved in theistic metaphysics, by whatever names they may be called, are either literal or symbolic.
Tertium non datur.

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