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Analytic Theology

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Analytic Theology

Michael Rea

Analytic theology is a contemporary approach within Christian theology that seeks to apply the methods and insights of analytic philosophy to theological questions. The term 'analytic theology' refers both narrowly to a particular kind of scholarly activity and more broadly to an overall style or approach to doing theology. Analytic theology may also be understood as an intellectual culture – 'a rough grouping within a particular intellectual discipline, such as philosophy or theology, that identifies itself as having a distinctive approach to its subject matter' (Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019: 10).

As an activity, analytic theology involves bringing the rhetorical style, theoretical methods, and literature of analytic philosophy to bear on theological topics. As a style or approach to doing theology, analytic theology is a self-consciously interdisciplinary enterprise that treats both the methodological virtues prioritized by analytic philosophers, as well as the theoretical developments available in the literature of analytic philosophy, as valuable tools and resources for theological theory-building. As an activity, analytic theology has its origins in the work of analytically oriented philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, Robert Adams, Marilyn McCord Adams, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Eleonore Stump, and others who, in the latter half of the twentieth century, played a major role in the revival of philosophy of religion and the growth of philosophical theology within academic philosophy. But the *concept* of analytic theology and the overall approach to which it refers is of more recent origin, a product, in the first instance, of conversations and work by Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea that resulted in (among other things) the edited volume, *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (2009), the decade-long series of Logos Workshops in Philosophical Theology at the University of Notre Dame, and the founding of the *Journal of Analytic Theology*. The intellectual culture of analytic theology has grown up in connection with these activities, as well as a wide variety of others undertaken by scholars in the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Finland, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and elsewhere.

Keywords: Analytic theology, Analytic philosophy, Philosophical theology, Systematic theology, Perfect being theology, Theological methods and approaches

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1 History of analytic theology

Although it is both plausible and, in certain ways, apt to think of analytic theology as having its roots in medieval scholasticism (Wood 2021: 285, 289-290), the activity of bringing the various tools and resources of specifically *analytic* philosophy to bear on theological topics has its origins in the revival of philosophy of religion in the middle of the twentieth century. The canonical story about that revival is that the road was paved most significantly by three developments: the wane of logical positivism, which implied that any claim not empirically verifiable was meaningless; the corresponding growth of work in speculative metaphysics; and the publication in 1955 of Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre's *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. The first of these developments opened up space for broader and more religion-friendly theorizing about the epistemology of religious belief; the second made room for metaphysical exploration of the nature and attributes of God and a variety of theological doctrines. The third development was what might be seen as the first fruits of these new-found degrees of freedom. (This story about the revival of philosophy of religion in the twentieth century is sketched in Wolterstorff 2009 and summarized in various other places, including Macdonald 2014 and McCall 2015.)

The revival of philosophy of religion proceeded along lines similar to the development of twentieth-century philosophy of science (see History of Science and Theology). Earlier works in the latter field tended to focus on questions about the nature of science, theory choice, laws of nature, and the like – questions that could be answered without much specialized knowledge of particular sciences. Later, the field became progressively more interdisciplinary, to the point that there are now heavily interdisciplinary subdisciplines within the philosophy of science, like the philosophy of physics, philosophy of biology, philosophy of chemistry, and so on – areas of inquiry which take as their focus concepts, theories, and problems in *particular* sciences rather than in the sciences taken together. Similarly, in the early days of the revival of philosophy of religion, there was an overwhelming tendency to focus on topics about religion, or God in general, that could be addressed with little or no special theological background. The main issues pertained to the rationality of religious belief, particular arguments for and against the existence of God, the possibility of religious discourse, and the coherence and compossibility of traditional divine attributes. Over the past several decades, however, the contents of scholarly journals and anthologies aimed more towards professional rather than student audiences have shown a gradual but marked increase in interest in more tradition-specific topics, like the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement, or the Buddhist doctrines of reincarnation and *karma*. The vast majority of tradition-specific work done by analytic philosophers of religion has thus far focused on the Christian religion.

Until the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, and in contrast to the parallel developments in philosophy of science, very little of this tradition-specific work was

done in a significantly interdisciplinary way. The idea of analytic theology was born out of puzzlement over, and dissatisfaction with, the lack of serious engagement between philosophers and theologians working on identical topics. Philosophical theology as practiced by analytic philosophers was commonly ignored by professional theologians; and analytic philosophers of religion, in turn, rarely engaged with the work of contemporary theologians. Moreover, there was some evidence that this state of affairs persisted as a result of deliberate decision rather than mere oversight or scholarly carelessness. Analytic philosophers and contemporary theologians were methodologically divided, so much so that the approach to theology taken by analytic philosophers was not recognized as genuinely theological by the theologians who were acquainted with it. Likewise, the style and background literature dominant in contemporary theology was not recognized as relevant, worthy of engagement, or (to the extent that it was heavily 'continental' in its orientation) even intelligible by analytic philosophers. One of the explicit goals of Crisp and Rea's *Analytic Theology* was to bring this methodological divide out into the open for discussion; and the primary motivation for the title was to introduce at the level of terminology the idea that an analytic-philosophical approach to theological topics was indeed a form of *theology*.

Since the publication of the Crisp and Rea volume, the field of analytic theology has grown and given rise to a dedicated journal (*The Journal of Analytic Theology*); at least two annual conferences (the Logos series at the University of Notre Dame and the Helsinki Analytic Theology (HEAT) Workshop); a monograph series (*Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology*); and a dedicated scholarly institute (the Logos Institute for Analytic and Exegetical Theology at the University of St Andrews). These developments have been accompanied by the publication of a variety of introductory and professionally oriented books specifically on analytic theology *itself* rather than simply *topics* in analytic theology. Importantly, too, analytic theology is not confined to the Christian tradition – there is, and has been for some time, significant scholarly work in Jewish and Islamic analytic theology, and there is increasing interest and some early pioneering efforts in analytic theology as it relates to other religious traditions. (See, for example, the websites associated with the Jewish and Islamic analytic theology initiatives funded by the John Templeton Foundation; Moad 2018; Lebens 2020; and the 'Diversifying Analytic Theology' symposium in volume 7 [2019] of *The Journal of Analytic Theology*).

2 The nature of analytic theology

As already indicated, analytic theology is intimately connected with analytic philosophy. There is, however, no universally agreed upon account of the precise nature of that connection. This section will briefly present and discuss five different (though clearly interrelated) characterizations.

2.1 Michael Rea – analytic theology as defined by its ambitions, style, and dialogue partners

In his introduction to *Analytic Theology*, as well as in later work, Michael Rea (2009) characterizes analytic theology as theology done with the ambitions of an analytic philosopher, in a style that conforms to the prescriptions that are distinctive of analytic philosophical discourse, and in dialogue with the literature of analytic philosophy. Analytic philosophy, on his view, is an approach to philosophical problems that is distinguished from other approaches by its rhetorical style, its ambitions, its technical vocabulary, and its background literature – an evolving body of literature that is typically understood as tracing back to G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and others of the early twentieth century who were in philosophical dialogue with them. These characterizations of analytic theology and analytic philosophy are not meant to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for something's counting as an instance thereof. Instead, the characterizations aim to express family resemblances; and (as Rea has noted in later work), in the case of analytic theology, being in dialogue with the literature of analytic philosophy is typically the most salient marker of that resemblance (Rea 2020: 4).

Rea identifies the ambitions of analytic philosophy as follows: (1) to identify the scope and limits of our powers to obtain knowledge of the world, and (2) to provide such true explanatory theories as we can for non-scientific phenomena. He notes that the first ambition is not unique to analytic philosophy, but tends to be pursued by analytic philosophers in a mode that presupposes higher expectations for setting aside sceptical arguments and grounding at least some claims to objective knowledge of the world. This is not to deny that there are substantive and influential analytic-philosophical defences of various forms of scepticism, relativism, or anti-realism; but such projects rarely present themselves as articulating or defending the 'standard' or 'common' view within analytic philosophy.

The second ambition, according to Rea, 'includes the quest for "local" explanations of particular phenomena – morality, causation, and composition for example', as well as 'the quest for some sort of "global" explanation that identifies fundamental entities and properties and helps to provide an account of human cognitive structures and their abilities to interact with and theoretically process facts about the fundamental objects and properties' (Rea 2009: 4–5). He notes that, insofar as accomplishing this latter goal would provide us with a metaphysical foundation for a final epistemological theory, the ambitions of analytic philosophy are connected, so that scepticism about our ability to fulfil one of them will imply scepticism about our ability to fulfil the others.

The rhetorical style Rea characterizes as a style paradigmatic instances of which conform (more or less) to the following prescriptions:

(1) Write as if philosophical positions and conclusions can be adequately formulated in sentences that can be formalized and logically manipulated. (Sometimes writing this way may involve actually trying to produce such formulations; sometimes it may involve presupposing in what one says, or doesn't say, about the positions and conclusions one is discussing that such formulations are possible.)
(2) Prioritize precision, clarity, and logical coherence.
(3) Avoid substantive (not merely decorative) use of metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content.
(4) Work as much as possible with well-understood primitive concepts, and concepts that can be analysed in terms of those.
(5) Treat conceptual analysis (insofar as it is possible) as a source of evidence.

The idea is not that works in analytic philosophy count as such by virtue of their success in conforming to these prescriptions, but rather that these prescriptions represent a kind of methodological and stylistic ideal among analytic philosophers towards which practitioners tend to strive. Moreover, Rea notes, the ideal embodied in these prescriptions is one that non-analytic philosophers typically reject and, in some cases, aim to violate, and for principled reasons. To take just one example that is often misunderstood: it is a rare scholar indeed who would say that precision, clarity, and logical coherence are of no value whatsoever; and it is likewise a rare scholar who aims for unintelligibility. But it is a legitimate and controversial question to what extent clarity, precision, and coherence ought to be prioritized.

On Rea's understanding, then, it is a certain conception of theoretical priorities that underpins the prescriptions on the above list and explains some of the more important differences between analytic philosophers and their counterparts working in other philosophical modes. The early twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said, 'What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent' (Wittgenstein and Russell 1998: 27). For those who believe this, it is natural (if not inevitable) to think that one simply should not bother 'saying' things in scholarly theoretical work unless one can achieve a certain high standard of clarity and rigour when saying them. But what if one thinks that some things can, and can *only*, be said unclearly – perhaps only by way of substantive, hard-to-unpack metaphors – and that some of these things are, furthermore, deeply important and well *worth* saying in that form? For such a person, analytic philosophical theorizing may yet have its uses, but it will hardly be useful for *all* (important, scholarly, theoretical) purposes.

Rea quotes Simon Critchley (2001) in further elaborating the difference between analytic and non-analytic philosophers. According to Critchley, the original aim of philosophy was not theoretical knowledge (as, he thinks, it is today) but rather *wisdom*, whereas now philosophy has been relegated to the role of 'an under-labourer to science, whose job is to

clear away the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge and scientific progress' (Critchley 2001: 1, 5). Rea notes that the ambitions of analytic philosophy articulated above naturally place philosophy in the latter role, since it is mostly in the sciences that one will find the details of the grand explanatory theory that analytic philosophers are collectively (more or less) working towards. The contribution made by philosophers is, as Quine puts it, to 'fill out interstices of [scientific] theory and lead to further hypotheses that are testable' (1995: 251). By contrast, '[t]he appeal of much that goes under the name of Continental philosophy', according to Critchley, 'is that it attempts to unify or at least move closer together questions of knowledge and wisdom, of philosophical truth and existential meaning' (2001: 9). Thus, as Rea sees it, those who object to analytic-philosophical theorizing will likely see the prescriptions laid out above as reflecting the wrong set of priorities, elevating clarity and precision above all else and ignoring the fact that sometimes, in order to attain wisdom and understanding, one may have to rely substantively on metaphor and other literary tropes, or conceptualize things in cognitively unfamiliar ways – ways that may involve departures from well-understood primitives, canons of logic, and so on.

In contrast to some conceptions of analytic philosophy, Rea's is entirely methodological; and so too, accordingly, is his conception of analytic theology. Thus, on his view, neither analytic philosophy nor analytic theology as such carry substantive philosophical or theological commitments. It is not uncommon to find philosophers and theologians alike suggesting that analytic philosophy or theology is committed to (for example) a correspondence theory of truth, epistemological foundationalism, belief in propositions (understood as abstract entities that are expressed by sentences), metaphysical realism, or various other positions. But, according to Rea, these attributions are founded on misunderstanding. Moreover, on his understanding of analytic theology, analytic theology may be done within any religious tradition with respect to which the notion of 'theology' makes sense – it does not, in other words, need to be treated as a distinctively Christian enterprise.

2.2 William Abraham – analytic theology as systematic theology

William J. Abraham, in his contribution to *Analytic Theology*, defines analytic theology as 'systematic theology attuned to the deployment of the skills, resources, and virtues of analytic philosophy' (Abraham 2009: 54). On this definition, analytic theology is a sub-field of systematic theology, and requires only *attunement* to the resources, skills, and virtues of its partner field in philosophy. Furthermore, although there is no substantive reason why this ought to be the case, the term 'systematic theology' has generally come to refer in academic discourse to an enterprise specifically focused on matters of *Christian* theology; and this seems to be the way in which Abraham himself uses the term (2009: 54). Given

this, his characterization excludes by definition the very idea that analytic theology might be done within other religious traditions – an exclusion that is now generally rejected within the field.

2.3 Oliver Crisp – analytic theology as defined by both methodology and substantive Commitments

Oliver Crisp's views on the nature of analytic theology have shifted in subtle ways over the years. According to the characterization in 'On Analytic Theology' (Crisp 2009), analytic theology is a scholarly activity definable in terms of its procedural elements and substantive philosophical-theological commitments:

> As I shall use the term, analytic theology has aspects that are both procedural and substantive. The procedural element concerns a particular analytic style of pursuing theology, including certain assumptions about why this procedure and not some other currently on offer is better suited to the task of theologizing. The substantive element includes several features that are interrelated: the presumption that there is some theological truth of the matter and that this truth of the matter can be ascertained and understood by human beings (theologians included!), and an instrumental use of reason. (Crisp 2009: 35)

For Crisp, the 'instrumental use of reason' contrasts with the 'substantive use of reason'. On his view, the latter 'depends on a highly contentious thesis, that reason alone, or reason and the senses, give us fundamental and general non-trivial knowledge about the world around us that every rational person can understand or is capable of understanding, and on the basis of which every rational person is able to make sense of the world' (2009: 41). An instrumental use of reason, however, simply treats reason as:

> a tool for establishing the logical connections between divergent propositions, for distinguishing what I am talking about from what I am not, and whether what I am saying makes sense, or is incoherent. Such reasoning also enables me to consider the validity of a particular argument that is put forward, and whether or not it is subject to less obvious defects of reasoning, like question-begging or affirming the consequent, and so on. (Crisp 2009: 41)

The point of making this contrast is to emphasize that analytic theology as such is not committed to the use of reason in theology in a way that presupposes the truth of the contentious thesis embodied in 'substantive' uses of reason, but only to the weaker, instrumental use of reason in theorizing.

Crisp's characterization of analytic theology contrasts with both Abraham's and Rea's. Unlike Abraham's, it does not imply either that analytic theology is wholly subsumed by systematic theology or that it is an exclusively Christian enterprise. However, it is still consistent with the claim that, as Crisp later argues, analytic theology 'may be practiced

as a species of ST [i.e. systematic theology], and should be received as such by the ST guild when it is practiced that way' (Crisp 2017: 157; see also Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019: 33-53). Unlike Rea's characterization, it does imply that analytic theology carries substantive commitments. That said, however, later work of Crisp's is more in harmony with Rea's on this matter. In *The Nature and Promise of Analytic Theology*, Crisp seems to have revised his view about the substantive commitments of analytic theology, rejecting the claim that analytic theology *carries* substantive commitments in favour of the more moderate claim that certain commitments tend to be *common* among analytic theologians (Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019: 3, 11, 15).

2.4 Analytic theology as an intellectual culture or tradition

According to yet another understanding, suggested by William Wood's characterization of analytic *philosophy* in both Wood 2016 and Wood 2021 and discussed as a serious proposal in Crisp et al. (2019), analytic theology might be thought of as an intellectual *tradition*. Commenting on the nature of analytic philosophy, Wood writes:

> Analytic philosophy really is a distinctive form of inquiry, but not because it has any unique, absolutely distinctive tools and methods. Analytic philosophy is a distinctive form of inquiry because it is the product of a shared intellectual culture that has created a distinctive intellectual tradition. (Wood 2016: 261; cf. Wood 2021: 49)

In characterizing the notion of an intellectual tradition, Wood quotes Alasdair MacIntyre, according to whom an intellectual tradition is:

> an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted. (MacIntyre 1989: 12, quoted in Wood 2016: 261)

Wood does not ultimately endorse a characterization of analytic *theology* as an intellectual tradition; but Crisp, Arcadi, and Wessling explore the possibility and incorporate the idea of an intellectual culture into their own final characterization of analytic theology (2019: 12-13). Thus, the proposal merits brief critical scrutiny here as well.

Although it is virtually undeniable that there exists a kind of intellectual culture and growing tradition associated with the field of analytic theology, the main reason to avoid identifying analytic theology with that intellectual culture or tradition is that it is clearly possible to engage in the activity of analytic theology without being ensconced in the associated culture or tradition. This is particularly clear in light of the sociological realities of the field of analytic theology and the disciplines from which it has emerged. As Crisp et

al. observe, if analytic theology were an intellectual culture or tradition, it would be a hybrid: analytic theologians proper would have to be 'full participant[s] in at least two intellectual cultures (or at least the best parts of each), namely, analytic philosophy and contemporary academic theology' (2019: 12). But, as noted in section 1 above, analytic theology originated at a time when very few, if any, scholars were full participants in the cultures of both academic theology and analytic philosophy; and during at least its first decade of growth, analytic theology flourished in the absence of infrastructure that would facilitate full participation in both cultures.

Aside from this fact, Crisp et al. point to a further problem with the characterization of analytic theology as an intellectual tradition. They note that 'one might wonder what, if anything, drives and shapes the intellectual culture of analytic theology' (2019: 13). They do not explicitly answer this question; but it seems that if one does pause to wonder about this, an answer immediately presents itself. The intellectual culture of analytic theology is driven by the values, ambitions, and commitments – things plausibly identified with what MacIntyre might call the 'fundamental agreements' – that lie at the very heart of the growing intellectual tradition associated with analytic theology. But if that is correct, then there is good reason to think that analytic theology should be characterized with reference to these things instead.

In the wake of their query about what drives the intellectual culture of analytic theology, Crisp et al. move on to develop their own characterization of analytic theology – the fifth and final account to be considered here.

2.5 Crisp, Arcadi, and Wessling – analytic theology as research programme

In *The Nature and Promise of Analytic Theology*, Oliver Crisp, James Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling write:

> Analytic theology […] may be characterized as a *research program* with a particular approach to theological matters that has generated an intellectual culture within contemporary theology, where Rea's five tenets and pair of ambitions do express some of the central and defining characteristics of analytic theology. (2019: 15, emphasis added)

The term 'research program' has a variety of different meanings – both 'ordinary language' meanings as well as at least two distinct technical meanings, one due to Imre Lakatos (1970) and another to Michael Rea (2002). In explicating their own use of the term, Crisp et al. note that they are following Rea (2002), saying that a research programme is '"a set of methodological dispositions" that academics bring to the table, where a methodological disposition is just some propensity or inclination to trust certain of our cognitive faculties, as well as certain sorts of experiences and arguments, as sources of evidence' (2019: 14).

They then identify the methodological dispositions definitive of analytic theology with the ambitions and stylistic prescriptions that Rea sets forward in his own characterization of analytic theology. Thus far, then, Rea and Crisp et al. seem to be in general agreement.

Nevertheless, immediately following the characterization quoted above, Crisp et al. say that, although this 'gets us closer to understanding' the nature of analytic theology, still 'something seems to be missing' (2019: 15). What is missing, it turns out, is discussion of the substantive philosophical-theological commitments that, while *not* definitive of analytic theology, are nevertheless held in common by a significant number of analytic theologians. The commitments, they say, include 'some form of theological realism; some claim about the truth-aptness, and truth-aimed nature of analytic theology; and some claim about the importance of providing theological arguments for substantive doctrinal claims that reflect the sort of intellectual virtues and sensibilities prized by analytic theologians' (2019: 15).

Does this further addition to their discussion of the nature of analytic theology mark a significant parting of ways with Rea? It would appear not. Strictly speaking, their explanation of the nature of analytic theology includes two claims – one about what analytic theology *is* (a certain kind of research programme) and another about what some of its causal results have been (the generation of a certain kind of intellectual culture within contemporary theology). There is broad agreement between Crisp et al. and Rea on what analytic theology *is* (the main difference being Rea's explicit emphasis on dialogue with the evolving literature of analytic philosophy). What then of the 'something missing', the discussion of the substantive commitments common among, but not definitive of, analytic theologians? This is most naturally construed as a characterization of the intellectual culture and the growing tradition that Crisp et al. and Rea (and others) take to be currently associated with, but – again – not essential to or definitive of analytic theology. Understood in this way, Rea and Crisp et al. will find themselves in agreement on this point as well.

2.6 Analytic theology and analytic philosophy of religion

One final comment on the nature of analytic theology: it is often asked how analytic theology relates to analytic philosophy of religion. Are they the same activity or enterprise, just under different labels? The answer depends on how one draws distinctions between philosophy and theology. Some draw the distinction *methodologically*. On this way of thinking, one might say that theology and philosophy overlap topically in the domain known as 'philosophy of religion', but theology is methodologically *confessional* whereas philosophy is not. That is, theology, unlike philosophy, is done in a way that is constrained to be faithful to a particular tradition, text, set of doctrines, or other authority besides 'pure reason'. Notably, however, nothing in this characterization precludes the idea that theology can be done in accord with the *style and ambitions* of analytic philosophy and in dialogue with its literature; so, on this way of drawing the distinction, the division between analytic

theology and analytic philosophy of religion will simply reduce to the division between philosophy proper and theology proper.

Alternatively, one might think that philosophy and theology are *topically* individuated (with a great deal of overlap between them). On this view, one might say that analytic theology and analytic philosophy of religion are overlapping subfields of theology and philosophy respectively, but the former includes work on theological topics that would typically be seen to fall outside the domain of philosophy (e.g. the development of a distinctively and self-consciously Reformed ecclesiology), whereas the latter includes work on religious topics (e.g. the nature of religion itself) that would typically be seen as having little to do with theology. (For further discussion of the distinction between analytic theology and analytic philosophy of religion, the distinctively theological nature of analytic theology, or both, see Baker-Hytch 2016; Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019; Stump 2013; Torrance 2019; and Wood 2016 and 2021).

3 Why analytic theology?

It is sometimes asked what *motivates* the project of analytic theology. Although it certainly makes sense for theologians to draw on whatever other fields of scholarship they can to help enrich their own theoretical activity, it is hardly to be expected that every such interdisciplinary foray would or should result in the creation of a new subfield, or 'style' of doing theology. 'Chemical theology', for example – a fortunately merely hypothetical interdisciplinary subfield that brings the methods and tools of contemporary chemistry to bear on theological topics – is an obvious non-starter. What, then, motivates the analytic theological enterprise?

The first step to answering this question is to examine what benefits engagement with analytic philosophy might bring to theological scholarship. In light of (portions of) the history of analytic philosophy, one might have expected there to be little benefit. In the era of logical positivism, for example, one might well have thought that analytic philosophy as such was deeply hostile to theology. In the chapter of *Language, Truth, and Logic* entitled 'Critique of Ethics and Theology', A. J. Ayer argues that the claim that 'God exists' is most reasonably construed as a metaphysical claim and, as such, it 'cannot be either true or false', and, indeed, is altogether meaningless (Ayer 1952: 115–116). But, of course, philosophy has moved on from logical positivism; and, partly as a consequence of this, metaphysics has been flourishing for many years.

But to say that contemporary theology can benefit from drawing on the insights in *metaphysics* to be found in contemporary analytic philosophy is to tell only part of the story about why people have found engagement with the analytic tradition beneficial. Even a cursory glance at contemporary and historical systematic theologies will reveal a host of topics in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and other areas of philosophy that

lurk in the background of the distinctively theological questions under discussion, and that have received careful theoretical treatment by analytic philosophers. There are insights to be mined in many quarters of the analytic tradition.

Still, nothing that has so far been said about the benefits of engaging with analytic philosophy goes much distance towards explaining why anyone might have a *preference* (as some do) for doing analytic theology, as contrasted with (say) theology that draws more heavily on insights to be found in Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, the Thomistic tradition, contemporary postmodern philosophy, or any of a variety of other sources. But the mere citation of these other potential sources of insight – all of which have been mined to good effect by contemporary theologians – points the way to an answer. Why might one have a preference (as some clearly do) for engaging in postmodern theology, for example? The obvious superficial answer is that one sees in certain postmodern thinkers, or the tradition as a whole, a mode of theorizing and a body of literature produced in that mode that can fruitfully be brought to bear on important theological questions. If it is asked *why* one thinks the relevant mode of theorizing and body of literature can be *fruitfully* brought to bear on theological questions, it seems that no further answer is required, either for explanation of one's preference or for scholarly justification of the project, than to point both to one's own interest in postmodern thought and to its broader interest and influence within the academy on topics that are of clear relevance to one's theological questions. Importantly, there is clearly no need to show that postmodern theorizing is in any way *superior* to other modes of theorizing; nor is there any need to show that postmodern theology can accomplish precisely the goals that have been set for other forms of theological theorizing (e.g. Thomistic theology, or Hegelian theology, or whatever). There is no need to convince other theologians that *they* ought to become postmodern theologians, too. Let a thousand flowers bloom. So likewise in the case of those interested in drawing on the analytic tradition in their theological theorizing.

That said, however, at least two further points can be made by way of explaining the preference of some for theorizing in the analytic mode. First, in explaining the 'promise' of analytic theology, Crisp et al. point to the fact that analytic theology is a *generative* research program. In explaining their notion of a generative research program, they write:

> [A] *generative research program* is one that produces new ways of thinking about a particular data set or body of work that provides a better, or more helpful way of thinking about the material than competing research programs. A better way of thinking about a body of material would be one that explains more of the data than alternatives, and/or is more parsimonious than the alternatives (that is, provides a simpler, more elegant account of the relevant data with fewer theoretical commitments) […] A generative research program in theology will be one that provides new ways of thinking about the body of doctrinal, and particularly dogmatic, material that has been generated by the sources of theological evidence and reflection on those sources of evidence, and that offers a better, that is, more satisfactory account of the various sources and the concepts and doctrines

> that they have generated than alternative explanations. It also seems that a generative theological research program will often provide a more parsimonious explanation of the same data as well. (Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019: 56, 57, original emphasis)

Although Crisp at al. do not say so, we might observe that notions like 'better' and 'more helpful' are effectively *defined* in this quotation in terms of certain theoretical virtues, like *explanatory power*, *parsimony*, *elegance*, and the like. These are, of course, among the core theoretical virtues prized in the natural sciences, too; and it is no accident that the virtues prized by analytic theologians coincide with those valued in the sciences. Many analytic philosophers, maybe most, think of the analytic philosophical enterprise as continuous with the natural sciences in important ways; and even those who would resist that conception of analytic philosophy in general nonetheless tend to prize the same sorts of theoretical virtues. Granted, there will be controversy over whether 'goodness' or 'helpfulness' in a theory is best defined in terms of those virtues; and those who think that they are not may well both deny Crisp et al.'s claim that analytic theology is 'better' and 'more helpful', and may furthermore resist participating in analytic theology altogether. But it is important to note that this is ultimately a merely superficial disagreement with what Crisp et al. are really trying to convey on behalf of the promise of analytic theology. Their main point, it seems, is just that for those who *do* prize the virtues they cite, analytic theology scores quite highly as a mode of theorizing; and for those who furthermore accord these virtues greater weight than those on display in other modes of theorizing, what Crisp et al. have to say on behalf of analytic theology may well be a decisive reason for preferring it.

A second, and perhaps unexpected, claim that has been made on behalf of analytic theology is that it can be engaged in as a kind of spiritual practice. According to William Wood, 'It is possible to treat analytic theology as an authentically Christian spiritual practice because certain specific features of analytic argumentation can be regarded as spiritual exercises that cultivate virtue' (Wood 2014: 44). He goes on to argue that four specific features of analytic theorizing 'are especially conducive to the life of virtue': cultivating attention, argumentative transparency, imaginative identification with opponents, and passively waiting for insight (Wood 2014: 55). These features, he maintains, can all 'have the effect of fostering the virtue of humility and of cultivating a desire for truth, which in the Christian tradition may be understood as a desire for God' (Wood 2014: 55).

Wood is not, of course, committed to the idea that analytic theorizing is *categorically* beneficial to the spiritual life; and Rea has offered reasons elsewhere for thinking that it may be in some ways detrimental (Rea 2017). Moreover, it is unlikely that the promotion of the life of virtue is anyone's primary, explicit motivation for engaging in analytic theology. Nevertheless, the fact that it is connected to virtue in the ways Wood points to may well go

a significant way towards explaining why some theologians are attracted to analytic modes of theorizing.

4 Criticisms of analytic theology

Our first section began with the observation that there is no uniform agreement among practitioners of analytic theology as to its nature. This fact has been decried by at least one critic as a ‘philosophical mark of shame’ upon the field, and so it makes for a natural starting point in this section devoted to criticisms of analytic theology.

Commenting on what he sees as vagueness in the characterization of analytic theology, Martin Westerholm writes:

> We might note for now that critics have pointed out that inability to define oneself is a philosophical mark of shame, and the embarrassment would seem particularly acute where insistence on clear definition is a hallmark of the school in question. (Westerholm 2019: 232–233)

The mere fact that critics have made this point, however, is not by itself a reason to accept it; and the fact is that there is no obvious reason for thinking that the practitioners of *any* field ought to be able to offer precise definitions of their field’s nature. Notoriously, very few concepts admit precise definition – a point that is itself often raised by critics of analytic philosophy as a reason for thinking the discipline is overly narrow. Academic fields and modes of inquiry are especially intractable in this regard, and this is well known. Witness, for example, the vast and ultimately inconclusive literature on the nature of science, or the likewise vast and inconclusive literature on the aims of science (most saliently, whether science aims at *truth* or mere *empirical adequacy*). In fact, if (as was suggested earlier in this entry) the criteria by which a piece of scholarship counts as analytic theology are to be understood in terms of family resemblance to paradigm cases rather than satisfaction of particular necessary and sufficient conditions, one ought to *expect* that analytic theology will elude precise characterization and that its exact nature will therefore be subject to disagreement, even among its practitioners.

Analytic theology has been subject to a variety of other criticisms over the years – among them, that it is (by nature, rather than by mere sociological accident) ahistorical in various ways; that it is dogmatically committed to the correspondence theory of truth or some form of metaphysical realism; that it is committed to prioritizing the authority of reason over scripture in theological theory-building; that it is inimical to certain important goals of theology (e.g., cultivating reverence for God, or an appreciation of divine mystery or ineffability); or that it is problematically committed to the enterprise of ‘perfect being theology’. Let us take each in turn.

Let us begin with the objection that analytic theology is ‘ahistorical’. The core of this objection is that analytic theology tends to focus more on abstractions and idealizations, with insufficient attention paid to the history and historical situatedness of the theological doctrines it takes as its subject matter. Simon Oliver expresses the concern this way:

> It is not simply that theologians bemoan analytic philosophy’s apparent naivety in the reading of historical texts or that such philosophy frequently imposes concepts, categories or questions which are alien to those texts (think of the way in which Anselm’s *Proslogion* is read through the lens of the ontological argument for God’s existence, or, as Coakley points out, the category of ‘experience’ is used to read texts in mystical theology). Rather, the concern with history is better reflected when one recalls why theologians have been quick to engage with continental philosophy. In this tradition, genealogy is an important part of philosophical method. There are a variety of such genealogical approaches, demonstrated in thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche and Foucault. The key point, however, is simple: concepts have histories. They therefore have genealogies which have to be traced in order that our understanding of those concepts, and the rationalities which formed them, might best be understood. As such, history is determinative of concepts, or at least indicative of the *meaning* of concepts. In so far as Christian doctrine is conceptually formed, tracing the genealogy of concepts is part-and-parcel of tracing the genealogy of doctrine. (2010: 466–467)

Others have expressed the ‘ahistoricity’ concern in somewhat different ways (see Branson 2018; McCall 2015; and Rea 2009). But, in broad outline, both the worry and the most promising line of reply are the same in each case.

The main reply to this objection, in short, is that even if the charge of ahistoricity applies to some (or even many) *instances* of analytic theology, it does not accurately characterize analytic theology *as such* (cf. Branson 2018; McCall 2015; Rea 2009; and Torrance 2019; and, for a particularly detailed reply with emphasis on Oliver in particular, see Sarisky 2018). It is just obvious that there is nothing in the nature of analytic theology that mandates a naïve or anachronistic reading of historical texts. But neither is there anything in analytic theology that mandates theorizing under the supposition that concepts lack histories, or that tracing the genealogy of a concept is unimportant for understanding the meaning of the concept. That this latter claim is true should be clear upon inspection of the characterizations of analytic theology offered in the first section above; but it is also evident in the analytic theological literature itself (see Crisp 2007, Crisp 2014 and Crisp 2015; Hector 2015; Pawl 2016 and 2019; and Lebens 2020).

The second concern is that analytic theology is (problematically) wedded to metaphysical and theological realism, and perhaps also to a correspondence theory of truth. As noted earlier, both of these philosophical commitments are common among analytic theologians; and Crisp’s early (2009) characterization of analytic theology suggests that both are inherent in analytic theology. But the perspective of the present article (which endorses both Rea’s understanding of the nature of analytic theology and Crisp et al.’s (2019)

broader characterization of what analytic theology both is and has generated) is that analytic theology is in fact committed to neither of these claims.

Even a casual survey of the analytic philosophical literature on the nature of truth reveals that the correspondence theory, far from being a *commitment* of analytic philosophy, is in fact a rather controversial theory that has no claim even to being the *majority* view among analytic philosophers. Nor can it even claim to be a view to which one is committed by virtue of endorsing realism in metaphysics or realism about truth (cf. Alston 1996 and Devitt 1996). Thus, if it were a commitment of analytic theology, it would be so only by virtue of *theology's* being inherently committed to a correspondence theory of truth. But there seems to be no more reason to think that theology as such is committed to the correspondence theory than there is for thinking that analytic philosophy (or distinctively realist analytic philosophy) is so committed; and even if there were, it is worth noting that one could no longer object to analytic theology *in particular* by citing its correspondence-theoretic commitments. Thus, as an objection to analytic philosophy, the charge of problematic commitment to the correspondence theory of truth seems to be a non-starter.

The objection that analytic theology is problematically committed to realism is one that Rea has rebutted in multiple places (2009; 2020; Panchuk and Rea 2020). The general thrust of that rebuttal has been that the nature of analytic theology is to be understood in terms of its methodology (specifically, its style, ambitions, and dialogue partners), and there is nothing in that methodology that proscribes theological inquiry under anti-realist suppositions. That said, however, there is an interesting debate to be had about whether *theology as such* is an inherently realist enterprise. John Webster (2015), for example, has argued that an activity is truly 'theological' only when it is motivated not by mere curiosity but by a desire to *know God*; and one might reasonably think that such a desire makes sense only if one is a realist about theological matters. If Webster is right – and if the realist consequence does indeed follow from his conception of what counts as theological – then theology as such, whether analytic or not, is committed to realism. But in that case, again, commitment to realism cannot be raised as a 'problem' specific to analytic theology.

The third concern is the alleged commitment of analytic theology to prioritizing reason over scripture. The concern presumably arises out of the thought that analytic *philosophy* is methodologically committed to prioritizing sources of evidence in this way, together with the idea that analytic theologians are, as such, committed to employing the methods of analytic philosophy in their theorizing. J. L. Schellenberg (2007) gives voice to the conception of philosophy just mentioned, albeit not with the aim of raising this particular objection against analytic theology. Warning against a 'potential confusion of theology and philosophy', he writes:

> We have – all of us – been influenced by the many attempts of theology to make God fit the actual world. Theology starts off by accepting that God exists and so *has* to make God fit the world: in a way, that is its job. But our job as philosophers, faced with the question of God's existence, is to fight free from the distractions of local and historical contingency, to let the voice of authority grow dim in our ears, and to think for ourselves about what a God and a God-created world would be like. When we think at the most fundamental level about the idea of God, we cannot assume that probably God's nature is in accord with the actual world, *and so we cannot take as our guide a picture of God fashioned by theology over the centuries on that assumption*. (Schellenberg 2007: 197–198, original emphasis)

Although Schellenberg does not add this explicitly, presumably one who thinks of philosophy in this way would say that, just as we cannot take as our guide a picture of God fashioned by *theology* over the centuries, so too we should not be guided by pictures of God fashioned by the ancient texts collected in various different canons of scripture.

Against this objection, however, Rea (2018: 59–60) has responded that Schellenberg's advice to philosopher-theologians is relevantly parallel to the following (hypothetical) speech offered as advice to would-be philosophers of time:

> ADVICE. It is our job as philosophers to think for ourselves about what a temporal world would be like; and so when we think at the most fundamental level about the idea of time, we cannot assume that probably the nature of time is in accord with the actual world; and so we cannot take as our guide a picture of time fashioned by physics and empirical results over the past hundred years on that assumption.

Rea notes that advice like this is not absurd. Research in accord with it will not shed much light on the nature and existence of what physicists call 'time', but it will shed some light on the nature and existence of a certain kind of commonsense or philosophical conception of time. Such research might well be valuable, too. But, even so, philosophers of time can and typically do have a rather different research goal – namely, to find out about the nature and existence of what *physicists* call 'time'. Furthering that goal requires a research methodology that accords heavy weight to the theories physicists have given and to the empirical data that serves as the basis of their theorizing. And, importantly, there is no reason to doubt that such a methodology counts as 'philosophical'. The interdisciplinary subfield of philosophy of physics is dominated by just such a methodology; and something similar is true of other interdisciplinary subfields of philosophy.

So likewise, then, in the case of analytic theology. Although it is surely of interest to see how far one can get in developing a fully rationalistic conception of God, theologians theorizing from within a particular religious tradition can *and should* adopt a methodology that accords heavy weight to the scriptures and theological theories that belong to their tradition; and, just as there is no reason to think that applying the methods of analytic philosophy in one's theorizing about time precludes such a research methodology, so too

there is no reason to think that this methodology is out of bounds for one seeking to apply the methods of analytic philosophy to one's theorizing about God (see God and Philosophy of Time).

One might worry at this point that, even if the methods of analytic theology do not explicitly prescribe prioritizing reason over scripture in one's theorizing, insofar as the methodology itself is not derived from scripture, it somehow embodies such a prioritization. Scripture itself prescribes neither the ambitions nor the style of analytic philosophy; but then, one might wonder, whence comes the methodological authority of those ambitions and prescriptions, if not from reason alone? To this, however, the analytic theologian might offer at least two different replies. One reply is to deny that they have any authority. Analytic theology is, like any other mode of inquiry, akin to a game: if one wishes to 'play' one must, by definition, abide by certain rules; but there is no reason to think that the rules themselves are categorically authoritative, apart from the desire to play the game. The other reply is that the very same question arises with respect to the study of scripture itself. To study scripture, one must do so in accord with some method or other, whether that be the method of 'plain-meaning' interpretation, or the methods of historical biblical criticism, or some other methods. But none of these methods are specifically prescribed (or proscribed) in scripture itself; and, even if they were, that fact could not be gleaned from scripture unless one had independently (and in advance of looking into the matter) adopted a method of interpreting scripture that would allow one to discern what scripture has to say about its own interpretation. So if adopting a method not derived from scripture is a problem for the analytic theologian, it is also a problem for anyone hoping to derive anything at all from scripture, in which case it besets the critics of analytic theology as much or as little as it besets analytic theologians themselves.

The alleged commitment to prioritizing reason over scripture has been rebutted in other ways in the literature as well. Eleonore Stump (2013), for example, argues that there is flexibility and significant variance in the 'authorities' prioritized by both philosophers and theologians:

> It is true that the theology of the Abrahamic religions takes putatively revealed texts as authoritative and philosophy does not. But different communities within philosophy differ in the authorities they are willing to accept, too, as the continuing divide between continental and analytic philosophy illustrates. For that matter, obviously, theology itself is divided with regard to the religious authorities it is willing to recognize. So it is not the case that within either philosophy or theology there is one set of authorities universally accepted by all those who take themselves to be working within the discipline. Although post-modernists might not be right in their willingness to accept diverse authorities as equally valid, they are surely right in their claims that everyone begins with some authorities, some testimony accepted on trust, some unexamined set of presuppositions. (Stump 2013: 49)

Given all this, it seems clear that even if, as Stump notes, philosophy *as a discipline* does not generally recognize any particular religious text as authoritative, there is nothing inherent in (analytic) philosophical methodology as such that *precludes* doing so.

In a similar vein, Tom McCall (2015) argues at length against the idea that analytic theology is 'only a dressed-up version of natural theology', which latter he characterizes (following Charles Taliaferro) as 'the practice of philosophically reflecting on the existence and nature of God independent of real or apparent divine revelation of scripture' (McCall 2015: 41). Against this idea, he reiterates the point that there is nothing in the ambitions or style of analytic theology that precludes according heavy weight to the testimony of scripture; and he also argues for the possibility of an 'extreme Barthian' analytic theology, or one that absolutely rejects the method of natural theology in favour of one that accords supreme theoretical authority to God's revelation in Christ and through scripture.

Finally, we might note that, although Crisp et al. (2019) do not address the objection head-on, there is a reply to it embedded in their idea (offered in response to the idea that analytic theology is just a 'contemporary form of philosophy of religion masquerading as theology') that analytic theology is often practiced as a form of 'declarative theology'. Citing the medieval distinction between two equally legitimate modes of theological theorizing, 'declarative' and 'deductive', they quote Durandus in characterizing each:

> [Declarative theology] is, 'a lasting quality of the soul by means of which the faith and those things handed down in Sacred Scripture are defended and clarified by using principles that we know better' […] Deductive theology, on the other hand, is 'a lasting quality of the soul by means of which it deduces further things from the articles of faith and the sayings of Sacred Scripture in the way that conclusions are deduced from principles.' (Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019: 21, citing Brown 2009: 406 for the quotations from Durandus.)

Both modes of theorizing, they note, 'focus on the teaching of Scripture and the articles of faith'; but the emphasis of declarative theology is on enabling 'one who already believes the articles of faith to do so with greater confidence and clarity' (Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019: 23–24). Presumably the one who *already* believes the articles of faith may well do so on the basis of the authority of scripture or tradition, or both. So it follows that it is no part of declarative theology to *prioritize* reason over scripture or tradition in the formation of theological belief. Given that Crisp et al. are correct that analytic theology is often practiced *as* a form of declarative theology, it can likewise be no part of analytic theology to prioritize reason over scripture or tradition in the way that critics have charged.

Lastly, we turn to the relationship between analytic theology and perfect being theology, a philosophical method of theorizing about the nature and attributes of God that traces back at least to Anselm of Canterbury, and which has been the pre-eminent philosophical-theological method not only in the Middle Ages but also in contemporary analytic

philosophy of religion. The question to be addressed here is whether, by virtue of its alliance with contemporary analytic philosophy, analytic theology is susceptible to the same objections as perfect being theology.

Perfect being theology, as it is typically characterized, is an intuition-based philosophical method of explicating the nature and attributes of God which treats the attribute of *perfection* as the controlling attribute for discovering other attributes of God. As Thomas V. Morris (1991) notes, it can be deployed in a 'purely philosophical' way or with 'revelational control' – i.e. in a way that takes the claims of scripture as providing both data for and constraints upon the theological theories that one ultimately builds. Even with revelational control, however, perfect being theology relies heavily on intuitions, or purely rational insights, about goodness and perfection. On the usual characterization, the practitioners of the method proceed by sorting properties into those that are 'great-making' (that is, properties that are intrinsically good to have, or that things are *better* for having) and those that are not, and then by attributing to God the greatest possible array of great-making properties. So, for example, being knowledgeable, powerful, free, independent, and good, are supposedly all great-making properties: other things equal, something that has one of these properties is better than something that does not. Accordingly, on the standard characterization of perfect being theology, perfect being theologians can safely infer that God has each of these properties to the maximal degree, at least so long as it is metaphysically *possible* for something to have all of them to the maximal degree. In the face of arguments for the conclusion that (for example) being maximally free is inconsistent with being maximally good, perfect being theologians are constrained by their method either to rebut the argument or to trade off their attributions of freedom and goodness to God in accord with their intuitions (or revelational data, or both) about whether an array of attributes that includes maximal goodness but not maximal freedom is better or worse than an array that includes maximal freedom but not maximal goodness.

Perfect being theology has been subject to a wide variety of criticisms, some focused on its philosophical failings (see, e.g., Speaks 2018) and others focused on its theological failings (see, e.g., Gunton 2003; Hampson 1996; and Vanhoozer 2010). The ones most relevant to the present entry are those that focus on failings that allegedly arise out of its status as an intuition-driven philosophical method. There are two of these: (1) that perfect being theology leads its practitioners into a kind of idolatry, and (2) that perfect being theology is inevitably tainted by implicit bias.

The concern about idolatry arises because, in relying on philosophical intuitions, perfect being theology allegedly runs the risk of developing a conception of God that departs in significant ways from whatever conception(s) of God arise(s) simply out of careful reflection upon biblical texts (see Theological Reflection). And, of course, classical theism – the conception of God produced by way of the method of perfect being theology in the

Middle Ages – *does* depart in significant ways from what many take to be a suitably biblical conception of God. According to classical theism, God is (among other things) simple (lacking parts and, as it is usually interpreted, lacking even distinct attributes), immutable (unchangeable), incomprehensible (in some important sense beyond our concepts), and atemporal (outside of time). But all of these attributes, at first glance anyway, clash in significant ways with what many take to be conceptions of God that arise out of natural readings of the biblical texts. Thus, critics maintain, the result of perfect being theology is a 'God of the philosophers' rather than *the God of the Bible* – an idol, rather than true God.

The concern about implicit bias arises because philosophical intuitions, or rational insights, seem to be little more than what one might call 'episodes of obviousness', episodic conscious states in which some proposition appears to be obviously or necessarily true (cf. Bealer 1996 and Bealer 1998; and Rea 2002: 174–177). As such, they are very similar in kind, if not in degree, to less philosophically valuable cousins like hunches, ordinary opinions, or ungrounded convictions. But, as a matter of empirical fact, hunches, opinions, and ungrounded convictions are often infected by implicit (unconscious) biases against, for example, women and non-Caucasian races, and there seems to be little reason to doubt that philosophical intuitions are similarly infected. As feminist theologians have frequently noted, it hardly seems an accident that the predominantly male philosophers and theologians of the past arrived at a conception of God according to which God has to a maximal degree an array of properties the majority of which have historically been strongly associated with *maleness* (e.g. rationality, independence, agency, power, freedom, etc.). Nor does it seem an accident that, throughout the history of Christianity, the Western canon, dominated as it has been by white male authors and artists, has tended to represent both God and Jesus of Nazareth as white males.

The relevance for analytic theology of these objections to perfect being theology is simply this: to the extent that reliance on philosophical intuitions is the source of these problems, analytic theology's status as a philosophical enterprise would seem to make it just as susceptible to the problems as perfect being theology is. In fact, there is a relevant difference between the two enterprises.

Perfect being theology is alleged to be problematic not simply because it relies on philosophical intuitions, but because it relies on them in a particular way or to a particular degree. The critics of perfect being theology who are not also critics of theology in general (i.e. the ones who think genuine theological knowledge is possible, but that perfect being theology is a defective means of arriving at it) typically maintain that theological knowledge needs to be derived ultimately from revelation rather than reason. But biblical interpretation does not occur in a philosophical vacuum; nor does interpretation of historical events as revelatory of God and God's intention. At least some of our philosophical views, as well as a wide range of 'common-sense' and scientific opinions, are part of the overall

set of background beliefs that we bring to the table when we interpret anything. Thus, any attempt to derive a coherent set of theological views from scripture, God's (putative) acts in history, or some combination of these, will inevitably be informed by a variety of background philosophical commitments. Accordingly, if the above problems with perfect being theology are genuine and somehow endemic to the method, they are so not simply because perfect being theology is reliant on philosophical intuition, but because it relies on philosophical intuition in a particular way (yet to be specified) or to a particular degree. This is not to concede that the problems with perfect being theology *are* genuine – that is a matter to be decided elsewhere. It is only to say that *if* the problems are genuine, they are due not to the endemic use of philosophical intuition, but rather to endemic *problematic* use.

Analytic theology as it has been characterized here, however, embodies no prescriptions about the manner in which, or degree to which, philosophical intuition can or must be treated as evidence in theology. Accordingly, nothing endemic to analytic theology can possibly prescribe whatever 'problematic' use of philosophical intuition is supposed to characterize perfect being theology. Moreover, as part of a self-consciously interdisciplinary enterprise, good work in analytic theology will aim to display theoretical and methodological virtues prized by both disciplines. Accordingly, it will be endemic to analytic theology to prize biblical exegesis, avoid over-reliance on intuitions, and be sensitive to relevant historical material in just the way that 'good theology' (whatever exactly that comes to) does. Admittedly, theologians will differ in their opinions about what exactly constitutes appropriate exegesis and the application thereof to theological theorizing, and they will likewise differ in their views about what counts as appropriate historical sensitivity and inappropriate reliance on intuition. But, importantly, precisely by virtue of analytic theology's lack of prescriptions on such matters, there is no reason to expect analytic theologians *as such* to fall uniformly within any particular camp staked out in relation to such controversies.

Attributions

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- ## Further reading

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