Introduction

THE FLOURISHING OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The past several decades have seen an extraordinary flourishing of philosophy of religion within the analytic tradition of philosophy. The essays that follow, written over a span of thirty-five years, are located within that development. In the essay that opens the collection, "Analytic philosophy of religion: retrospect and prospect," I offer a general characterization of the development, along with an account of the changes within the analytic tradition of philosophy that made analytic philosophy of religion possible in the form it has taken.

Most discussions from the Western philosophical tradition that we would classify as philosophy of religion fall under one or the other of three headings. Some are philosophical reflections on some aspect of the human phenomenon of religion: reflections on religious experience, on the nature of religious language, on liturgy and ritual, on the interpretation of sacred texts, on prayer, on the essence of religion, and so forth. Some are philosophical reflections on the epistemology of religious belief: reflections on the nature of religious belief, on what is required of a religious belief for it to count as knowledge and whether some religious beliefs do in fact count as knowledge, on what is required of a religious belief to be entitled and whether some religious beliefs are in fact entitled, on the probability that one and another religious belief is true, and so forth. And some are philosophical theology, that is, philosophical reflections on God and God's relation to experience and reality: reflections on various of God's attributes, on the relation of God to evil, on the relation of God to human freedom, on the relation of God to laws of nature, and so forth. Apart from the fact that analytic philosophers have displayed no interest in reflecting on the essence of religion, all the questions mentioned have been discussed over the past several decades, many at length.

At mid-twentieth century there were no intimations of this development. There were some discussions on various aspects of religion; observers might have expected those to continue, though not to flourish. But no philosophical theology was being done, not, at least, within mainline philosophy. Instead of talking about God, philosophers were debating whether it is possible to talk about God. Pervasive doubts on that score made reflections on the epistemology of beliefs about God irrelevant.

Why were philosophers not talking about God but debating whether it is possible to talk about God? Obviously some were not talking about God because they did not believe in God. But even those who counted themselves as theistic believers found themselves preoccupied with the meta-question of whether it is possible to speak about God. Why was that?

The immediate culprit was logical positivism, which at the time appeared to be in its prime but was in fact near death, as shortly became clear. The positivist criterion of meaning appeared to have the implication that theological sentences lack sense; the criterion had been formulated with that result in mind, among others. But preoccupation with the meta-question, whether it is possible to speak about God, did not begin with the positivists. It began with Kant.

A prominent theme in Kant's critical philosophy is that of the limits or boundaries of thought and knowledge. Confronted with the traditions of rational theology, rational psychology, and rational cosmology, Kant's critical philosophy led him to ask whether such enterprises represent attempts to trangress the boundaries of the knowable. Indeed, it became for Kant a serious question whether we can even have genuine *thoughts* about God – never mind whether any of those thoughts constitute knowledge. May it be that God is beyond the boundary of the thinkable? If so, then not even *theologia revelata* is possible.

The power of Kant's question has haunted and intimidated theology in the modern period, both theology as developed by theologians and theology as developed by philosophers. It has led theologians to preface whatever they have to say on theological matters with lengthy prolegomena; it led mainline philosophers to stay away from philosophical theology altogether, and to talk instead about religion and the possibility of theology. In the second essay in this collection, "Is it possible and desirable for theologians to recover from Kant?" I discuss in detail Kant's doctrine of limits and why this doctrine led him to regard it as a serious question whether God lies beyond the limits of the thinkable and

the knowable. I go on to argue that the assumptions underlying Kant's worry are mistaken.

In my own case, I felt I had to engage Kant. Most analytic philosophers who have engaged in philosophical theology in recent years have not felt they had to. They have forged ahead without worrying over questions concerning the possibility of the enterprise. The reason for their indifference lies in a rather surprising consequence of the demise of logical positivism. The topic of limits on thought, knowledge, and speech, prominent in modern thought since Kant, has lost all interest for philosophers in the analytic tradition (not so for philosophers in the continental tradition). Analytic philosophers do on occasion charge people with failing to think or speak sense. But it is now tacitly assumed that such claims have to be defended on an ad hoc basis; analytic philosophers are skeptical to the point of being indifferent to all grand limit proposals. Philosophical theology is no longer enervated by the Kantian anxiety.

KANT AND RATIONAL THEOLOGY

Kant did not draw from his critical philosophy the skeptical conclusions about theology in general that many have drawn and thought he drew. He did not even draw the skeptical conclusions about *rational* theology that many have drawn and thought he drew.

Kant did deny that we can have knowledge of God; many readers have run with this and interpreted him as denying the possibility of theology. But not so. Kant explained rational theology as differing from revelational theology in that the former is "based … solely upon reason"; and it was his view that a rational theology is possible.[1] It is possible to arrive at well-grounded conclusions about God on the basis of reason alone. From the *Critique of Practical Reason* onward, a good deal of what Kant himself wrote would have been regarded by him as rational theology. He did not regard it as knowledge, however. To understand why not, one has to realize that "knowledge" (*Wissen*), as he used the term, was a term of art. On his usage, a judgment constitutes knowledge only if it is related to experience in a certain way; he was convinced that judgments about God cannot be related in that way to experience.

[1] *Critique of Pure Reason*, A631 = B659. The passages I quote are all from *Critique of Pure Reason,* A631–2 = B659–60. I use the Norman Kemp Smith translation (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1929).

Rational theology comes in two main forms, said Kant. In one form, "it thinks its object … through pure reason, solely by means of transcendental concepts (*ens originarium, realissimum, ens entium*), in which case it is entitled *transcendental* theology." In the other form, it thinks its object "through a concept borrowed from nature (from the nature of our soul) – a concept of the original being as a supreme intelligence – and it would then have to be called *natural* theology." Those who engage in the former type of rational theology are called *deists*, says Kant; those who engage in the latter type are called *theists*.

> [Deists] grant that we can know the existence of an original being solely through reason, but maintain that our concept of it is transcendental only, namely, the concept of a being which possesses all reality, but which we are unable to determine in any more specific fashion. [Theists] assert that reason is capable of determining its object more precisely through analogy with nature, namely, as a being which, through understanding and freedom, contains in itself the ultimate ground of everything else. Thus the deist represents this being merely as a *cause of the world* … the theist as the *Author of the world*.

Transcendental theology, or deism, in turn comes in two forms. In one form, "it proposes to deduce the existence of the original being from an experience in general (without determining in any more specific fashion the nature of the world to which the experience belongs), and is then called *cosmo-theology*." Aquinas' argumentation for God's existence and for God's ontological attributes, in both his *Summa contra Gentiles* and his *Summa Theologiae*, is an example of what Kant has in mind by "cosmo-theology." The other form of transcendental theology holds that one "can know the existence of such a being through mere concepts, without the help of any experience whatsoever, and is then entitled *onto-theology*." Kant had in mind rational theology that begins with an ontological argument, such as Anselm's.

Natural theology also comes in two forms. "*Natural theology* infers the properties and the existence of an Author of the world from the constitution, the order and unity, exhibited in the world – a world in which we have to recognize two kinds of causality with their rules, namely, nature and freedom. From this world natural theology ascends to a supreme intelligence, as the principle either of all natural or of all moral order and perfection. In the former case it is entitled *physico-theology*, in the latter, *moral theology*."

In the third and fourth essays in this collection I discuss and critically appraise two attempts at rational theology. In "Conundrums in Kant's rational theology" I discuss Kant's attempt at rational theology

of the moral theological type, as we find it in his *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone,* coming to the conclusion that the attempt fails at crucial junctures. In the essay, "In defense of Gaunilo's defense of the fool," I discuss the opening argument in Anselm's attempt at rational theology of the onto-theological type, concluding that it too fails.

I approach Anselm's argument from a somewhat unusual angle. One consequence of the combination of the extreme brevity of Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence with its highly provocative character is that, over the centuries, many philosophers have tried to improve on his formulation of his argument. My own view is that most of these "improvements" are sufficiently different from Anselm's argument to make it best to view them as alternative ontological arguments. There is no such thing as *the* ontological argument; there is, instead, a large *family* of ontological arguments, Anselm's being the original member of the family.[2]

For a good many years, when teaching Anselm's argument, I too saw myself as improving on his formulation. The earliest written criticism of Anselm's argument that we possess was written by his contemporary, Gaunilo, and sent to Anselm for his response. I had my students read that part of Gaunilo's response in which Gaunilo claims that, by employing the principles to which Anselm appeals in his argument, one could reach the conclusion that there is a perfect island – which is absurd. I then undertook to explain to my students why Gaunilo's perfect island argument was not analogous to Anselm's argument.

But then one day it struck me that in his response to Gaunilo, Anselm did not explain why the perfect island argument is not an analogue to his argument for God's existence; instead, he blustered. That made me suspicious; so I undertook to study carefully the entire exchange. I was led to conclude that though Gaunilo was certainly not a first-rate philosophical mind and misunderstood Anselm on some points, nonetheless he discerned well enough what Anselm was actually arguing to put his finger on its fundamental flaw. The essay, "In defense of Gaunilo's defense of the fool," is thus a look at Anselm's argument through the lens of his exchange with Gaunilo.

[2] The best-known recent example of an ontological argument is that presented by Alvin Plantinga in *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974). Plantinga makes a brief attempt to show that he is getting at what Anselm had in mind; I do not find the attempt convincing. My view is that Plantinga's argument is not a reformulation of Anselm's argument but a new ontological argument.

ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY NOT KANT'S RATIONAL THEOLOGY

Kant would not regard the remainder of the essays in this collection as essays in rational theology,[3] nor would he regard most of the writings I have been calling "analytic philosophical theology" as rational theology. For the same reason he would not regard them as philosophical theology. He might regard them as *theologia revelata* – I'm not sure.

Why would he not regard them as *rational* theology, and thus not as *philosophical* theology? Because he would not regard them as "theology based solely upon reason." Given what he meant by that, he would be right; they are not theology based solely upon reason.

Kant did not explain what he meant by "theology based solely upon reason." But from his differentiation of various types of theology that he regards as based solely upon reason, we can make a good inference. Theology is based solely upon reason, and is thus rational or philosophical theology, only if it is based solely on premises that all normal, adult, appropriately informed human beings would accept if those premises were presented to them and they understood them. Possibly Kant had in mind additional restrictions on the sort of premises that theology may employ if it is to be rational or philosophical theology; but at least this restriction holds.

Many analytic philosophers of religion, myself included, engage in the enterprise as religious believers without making or having made any attempt to base our religious convictions on premises that all normal, adult, appropriately informed human beings would accept if those premises were presented to them and they understood them. With respect to a good many of our religious convictions we do not make, and have not made, any attempt to base them on any premises whatsoever. So too, many analytic philosophers who work in philosophy of mind enter the discussion as committed physicalists without making or having made any attempt to base their physicalist convictions on premises that all normal, adult, appropriately informed human beings would accept if those premises were presented to them and they understood them.

This description of how analytic philosophers engage in philosophy raises the obvious question, are they entitled to employ their Christian convictions in this way, or their physicalist convictions, or whatever? Are they not defecting from the high calling of the philosopher to base

[3] I myself do not regard the last, "Tertullian's enduring question," as philosophical theology.

philosophy solely upon reason? Kant would say they are defecting; present-day philosophers assume they are not. Why the change?

The change in view concerning what might be called *the epistemology of philosophy* reflects dramatic changes in epistemology generally over the past thirty years or so. Here is not the place to discuss those changes.[4] Let me simply say that most analytic philosophers operate on the assumption that little of interest would emerge if philosophers did in fact confine themselves to premises that all normal, adult, appropriately informed human beings would accept if those premises were presented to them and they understood them. There is no serious alternative to engaging in philosophy employing considerations that one finds compelling but that some of one's fellow philosophers do not. Philosophy has become a pluralist enterprise. Or rather, in spite of the self-perception of many philosophers, it always has been that.

But then why talk about *philosophical* theology? The term implies a distinction between theology as developed by philosophers and theology as developed by theologians – between philosophical theology and theological theology. Kant was carrying on the tradition of distinguishing the two by saying that philosophers appeal solely to reason whereas theologians appeal also to revelation. The now-current view among analytic philosophers concerning the epistemology of philosophy makes that way of distinguishing no longer applicable. The fact that someone views certain of his religious convictions as having their source in revelation does not imply that appealing to those convictions in the course of his reflections about God establishes that he is not engaged in philosophy.

I see no structural difference between philosophical and theological theology. In the West there is a distinct tradition and practice of philosophy, and a distinct tradition and practice of theology. Though these two traditions and practices overlap, we are all able to pick out works that clearly belong to one or the other. Whitehead's writings about God belong to the tradition and practice of philosophy – though theologians not infrequently read and discuss them. John Calvin's and Karl Barth's writings belong to the tradition and practice of theology – though philosophers now and then read and discuss Calvin and Barth. Philosophical theology is what emerges when someone engaged in the practice of philosophy and carrying on its tradition turns his or her reflections to God. Anyone acquainted with the two traditions and practices, that of

[4] I discuss them in several of the essays that will appear in another collection of mine, *Practices of Belief: Essays in Epistemology*, Terence Cuneo, ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

philosophy and that of theology, will recognize that the essays in this collection are philosophical.

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY AS A SPECIES OF PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY GENERALLY

With the exception of the last essay, "Tertullian's enduring question," all the essays, from the fifth on, are essays in which I deal directly with one or another of God's attributes or with some aspect of God's relation to the world. I do so by engaging, in a certain way, the tradition of Christian philosophical theology. Let me explain, beginning with an explanation of what I have in mind by *Christian* philosophical theology, and then explaining my particular mode of engagement with it. A happy consequence of overcoming the Kantian anxiety is that one can treat one's pre-Kantian predecessors in philosophical theology as genuine dialogue partners.

A prominent feature of how those philosophers who are Christians have gone about developing philosophical theology is that they have required of their reflections that they cohere with what Christian Scripture claims and presupposes about God.

Sometimes their reflections have been directly on some aspect of what Scripture claims about God. In my book *Divine Discourse*, for example, I reflect philosophically on the claim, running throughout Hebrew and Christian Scripture, that God said so-and-so, and on the claim often made *about* Christian Scripture that it is the word of the Lord. I was aware that the biblical writers were not alone in claiming that God had spoken to them or to someone they knew; so I realized that my reflections had broader relevance than just to the claims of divine speech made within and about Scripture. But in any case, I was not led by philosophical arguments to conclude that God speaks. I found this claim already being made; and I decided to reflect on it philosophically. It is, after all, an intriguing and highly provocative claim.

By contrast, Aquinas arrived at the conclusion that God is ontologically immutable by employing what Kant would have classified as rational theology of the cosmo-theological sort. (I discuss Aquinas' line of argument for God's immutability in the essay, "God everlasting.") Aquinas interpreted Scripture as claiming the very same thing, however; he held that philosophical reasoning and Scriptural claim converge on this point. So though it would be misleading to characterize Aquinas' reflections on divine immutability as philosophical reflections on the biblical claim that

God is immutable, it would also not be correct to say that the role of Scripture in his reflections on immutability was merely to set boundaries to his conclusions. He had independent philosophical reasons for holding that God is immutable; but he would have insisted that his reflections do not merely cohere with Scripture but are a philosophical articulation of Scripture's claim that God is immutable. So when I say that those philosophers who are Christians have required of their philosophical theology that it cohere with what Scripture claims and presupposes about God, it should not be inferred that the actual relationship has been no more than coherence. Coherence is the minimum.

A fair number of philosophical theologians have felt no compunction whatsoever to have their conclusions cohere with what Christian Scripture claims and presupposes about God; Plotinus and Whitehead come to mind. Conversely, many of those who have interpreted Scripture to find out what it claims and presupposes about God have had no interest in reflecting philosophically about God; many are in fact downright hostile to philosophical theology. Christian philosophical theology is the challenging project of achieving an understanding of God that both coheres with Scripture and is philosophically cogent.

Determining what Christian Scripture claims or assumes about God is no simple task. Distinguish between how some passage of Scripture presents God, what the writer (editor) of that passage was claiming or presupposing about God in thus presenting God, and what Scripture claims and presupposes about God.[5] What is directly before us when we read Scripture is the first; what we have to get to by interpretation is the last.

Some passages in Scripture present God as having wings; others present God as a rock. No interpreter believes that the writers (editors) of these passages were claiming or presupposing that God has wings or that God is a rock. A passage may present God as a rock without the writer claiming or presupposing that God is a rock; that will be the case if "is a rock" is being used metaphorically. Probably only completely dead metaphors can be fully parsed out into some literal equivalent. But when some biblical writer presents God as a rock, what he is claiming, at least, is that God is steadfast and reliable.

[5] In my *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) I argue that it is not texts that claim things, but authors (or editors) who claim things by way of authorizing a text, those claims then having various presuppositions. I likewise hold that metaphor, hyperbole, etc., are not matters of meaning but of use; authors (editors) use words metaphorically, hyperbolically, ironically, etc. In apparent violation of these principles, I will speak of Scripture as claiming and presupposing things about God. I speak thus so as to leave open the question of who it might be that is claiming and presupposing these things by way of the text of Scripture.

How do we decide whether some passage is to be interpreted literally or metaphorically – or hyperbolically, ironically, and so forth for all the other literary tropes? In *Divine Discourse* I argued for a general principle: literal interpretation is always the default option. A writer or speaker is to be interpreted as speaking literally – as saying what his words mean – unless there is good reason to conclude otherwise. Knowing, as I do, that Michael is not hallucinatory, I know that when he assertively uttered "the guy is a wolf," he was not saying (speaking literally now) that the man is a wolf; he was speaking metaphorically. So too, we all know that when some biblical writer said "God is a rock," he was not saying (speaking literally now) that God is a rock. Though non-literal interpretation always carries the burden of proof, often that burden is borne successfully.

But what the writer (editor) of some biblical passage claimed or presupposed about God is not necessarily what Scripture claims or presupposes about God. Christians for the most part have insisted that in interpreting Christian Scripture, we must go beyond treating it as a collection of loosely strung-together pericopes, also go beyond treating it as an assemblage of some sixty-six separate books, and treat it as one work, highly varied in its contents.[6] And for the most part they have insisted that in treating Christian Scripture as one work, we are to give priority to what the Gospels and the Pauline letters say God was doing in Jesus Christ. The combination of this principle of canonical unity with this principle of interpretive priority will sometimes lead to the conclusion that what the writer of some passage claimed or presupposed about God differs from what Scripture claims or presupposes about God – and that the latter differs even more from how the passage presents God. Some passages in the Old Testament present God as doing things (or as instructing human beings to do things) that all of us, along with most biblical writers, would regard as unjust. Yet all Christian interpreters interpret Scripture as teaching that God is just.

To get from how biblical passages present God to what Scripture claims and presupposes about God, one must subtly and judiciously employ complex interpretive strategies whose results often prove controversial. That might seem to take all bite out of even the minimal requirement of coherence cited above. If the philosophical theologian finds himself led by philosophical considerations to conclusions that conflict with how

[6] In *Divine Discourse* I did not devote much attention to what goes into interpreting a body of writings as one work. I discuss the issues more fully in "The Unity Behind the Canon," in Christine Helmer and Christof Landmesser, eds., *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2004).