

**Having Our Cake and Eating It, Metaphysically Speaking:  
Analogy as the Key to the Unity of Metaphysics as a Science of  
Being qua Being  
A Response to Oliva Blanchette**

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*This paper responds to Oliva Blanchette's essay, "Analogy and the Transcendental Properties of Being as the Key to Metaphysical Science." The author raises some critical questions, while agreeing with Blanchette's thesis that the doctrine of analogy is central to the resolution of problems in contemporary metaphysics. The response takes its starting point from Blanchette's assertion that 'analytical philosophy' fails to engage in genuinely metaphysical inquiry because it attempts to reduce all predications to univocal terms. The paper argues that 'analytical philosophy' is itself an analogous term and that some analysts have rejected this attempted reduction. Wittgenstein's later work is offered as an example. These observations about analytical philosophy are relevant to the central concerns of Blanchette's paper because the internal debate among analytical philosophers mirrors a perennial tension between the attempt to preserve the unitary character of metaphysics and the desire to have a science of the real. Analysts who reject analogous predication often do so because they think that non-univocal discourse will violate the truth-conditions for scientific inferences, because it will require repudiation of the principle of non-contradiction. This position has tended to predominate in analytical philosophy. Wittgenstein attempts to preserve the unity of philosophical reflection by recognizing the analogous nature of language. The price for Wittgenstein, however, is that we must reject philosophy's pretensions to be a science of the real. The response argues that this tension clarifies some of the challenges faced by Blanchette's proposal to recover the unity of metaphysics as a science of being qua being in the doctrine of analogy.*

**I: Introductory Remarks**

I want to thank Professor Blanchette and the *Institute for St. Anselm Studies* for giving me the opportunity to comment upon this rich and rewarding paper. While I am going to raise some substantive questions for clarification concerning its argumentation, this should not be taken as evidence that I disagree with the paper's fundamental thesis, or even many of its supporting arguments. On the contrary, I maintain that Prof. Blanchette, in the present essay and in his larger study *The Philosophy of Being*, has put his finger upon some of the most fundamentally important questions for philosophers of all stripes today.

The questions concerning the status of metaphysics and the centrality of the doctrine of analogy to the resolution of its status are vitally important. I agree with him that analogy is the key to untying the knots that bind the modern intellect from rediscovering the unity of metaphysics as an inquiry. I would add that the recovery of metaphysics should matter not only to metaphysicians, but to those laboring in other areas of philosophy as well. Aristotle surely understood that when he digressed into his critique of Plato's forms in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

We should explore, for instance, the ethical implications of the fact that the ‘be of beings’, including both God and creatures, is unique and unrepeatable. This would appear to have significant implications for our understanding of the dignity of persons and the sanctity of life. Prof. Blanchette opened my eyes to this point in his book when he criticized the Suarezian attempt to reduce being to an abstract concept. It reminded me of a lesson I had learned some time ago from Norris Clarke S.J., that ‘act is the self-revelation of being.’

Prof. Blanchette has suggested with regard to the larger project of his recent book, to which the subject of this paper is closely related, that it is time to cross a threshold into a new era where metaphysics is again practiced and appreciated. The prevailing philosophies of our time have been critical, even deconstructive, rather than constructive and systematic. This is certainly true. The death of metaphysics is a virtual axiom in many quarters. Yet, I am reminded of Etienne Gilson’s assertion that “metaphysics always buries its undertakers.” Perhaps we should add that metaphysics is always undertaken by those who attempt to bury it! This is a point that Prof. Blanchette aptly demonstrates. As I will suggest in what follows, I think this is especially the case with regard to the analytical tradition in philosophy. Some philosophers in this tradition have tried to bury metaphysics in the past, but they keep wandering into its domain everywhere they go.

They have, moreover, on occasion wandered into the terrain of the doctrine of analogy. On this subject, I will take some issue with Prof. Blanchette’s assertion that ‘analytical philosophy’ attempts to reduce all predications to univocal terms. There is a sense in which this is true. Many analytical philosophers do engage in that sort of attempt at disambiguation in philosophy. We will examine one such instance of the practice with regard to the doctrine of analogy itself, namely the work of William Alston. But, I think it can be shown by empirical observation that there is no essence of analytical philosophy, because the term is analogous. To borrow a phrase of Wittgenstein’s, analysts bear a ‘family resemblance’ to each other. This is not necessarily to assert that ‘family resemblance’ and ‘analogy’ are synonymous terms, but rather to suggest that Wittgenstein’s revolution in the history of analytical philosophy bears a resemblance to the sort of discovery Aristotle made when he argued that we must seek the unity of the science of metaphysics in the doctrine of analogy, over against the Platonic attempt to find the unity of a science in a single essence that constitutes its subject.

Wittgenstein’s appeal to the concept of ‘family resemblance’ reveals deep affinities with the Aristotelian notion of ‘pros hen equivocation.’ Wittgenstein’s rejection of the *Tractarian* account of reality, and his break with Russell and Whitehead’s attempt to reduce all discourse to formal logic, involved a return to ordinary language. One might even say Wittgenstein returned to common sense. There are important similarities here, and differences with the common sense realist approach to metaphysics in Aristotle and Aquinas. What they share is an intuition about the difficulty with philosophical attempts to abstract and reduce the real to a carefully disambiguated set of semantic categories. This is the desire behind attempts to reject all analogy in favor of univocal predication. One can understand the desire because of philosophy’s absolute

dependence upon the principle of non-contradiction, which Aristotle introduces in tandem with the doctrine of analogy in *Metaphysics* gamma.

The reader rightfully may be wondering what this discussion of analytical philosophy has to do with the substance of Prof. Blanchette's paper, aside from his brief remarks about analytical philosophers and univocal predication. That is a fair concern, since it is the job of a commentator to address the lecturer's principal thesis. In this case, the points made about analytical philosophy are apropos, precisely because the paper's central thesis is that the doctrine of analogy is the key to the unity of the science of metaphysics. What we see in the case of the internal debate in contemporary analytical philosophy is a struggle between the attempt to preserve the unitary and universal character of the most general claims about reality, and the attempt have a science of the real. Very roughly, those analytical philosophers who tend to reject analogous predication do so because they want a science of the real and they fear that non-univocal discourse will violate the truth-conditions for scientific inferences, because it will require repudiation of the principle of non-contradiction. This is not only true of thinkers who believe that they can attain knowledge of the real world, but also of some skeptics and anti-realists, who are merely disappointed realists. This position has tended to predominate in analytical philosophy, especially among those who have had pretensions to systematic thinking.

There is another strain within the tradition, however. Wittgenstein is an important representative of the tendency to reject efforts to establish a science of the real by disambiguation and reduction to univocal terms. Rather, we may oversimplify matters a bit by saying that Wittgenstein attempts to preserve the unity of philosophical reflection by recognizing the analogous nature of language. The price for Wittgenstein, however, is that we must reject philosophy's pretensions to be a science of the real. The later Wittgenstein requires a thoroughgoing repudiation of systematicity. With respect to Blanchette's thesis, what this indicates is a more general tension between the unity of metaphysics and its character as a science of being qua being when we embrace the doctrine of analogy. I am inclined to think that Blanchette will regard this dilemma as merely an apparent paradox brought on by our failure to transcend latent univocal thinking and to embrace fully the analogical way. Furthermore, I am predisposed to think that he would be correct to do that. In other words, I am very hopeful that there is a science of being qua being, and the key to its unity is analogy. Aristotle and St. Thomas give us great hope that this is so. Nevertheless, I am troubled by some of the puzzles that the aforementioned debate presents, whereby it appears we may either choose the unity of metaphysics or its scientific character, but not both. With good hope that we can resolve these *aporiae*, I wish to consider them briefly.

One way of considering this question is to examine a recent debate in the analytical philosophy of religion, more specifically the case of divine predication. Thomists will be familiar with this debate as a discussion of the divine attributes, one point at which Aquinas introduces his own discussion of the doctrine of analogy. In choosing this example I mean neither to reject the ontological difference between God and creatures, nor to neglect Professor Blanchette's claim that the primary subject of metaphysics is being qua being, not God. To the contrary, it is

the ontological difference that is the problem. If we are seeking to examine the unity of metaphysics as a science, however, surely the case of the relationship between similar divine and human predicates is an important test of the unity of that science. This is most evident with regard to the transcendentals, which are treated at length in the paper, and the so-called pure perfection terms, which apply to beings upon both sides of the creature / creator divide.

The current fashion in the philosophy of religion is to speak of discourse about the Godhead as irreducibly metaphorical, precisely because it is thought that there can be no unity between the application of such concepts to human beings and the divine being. Some analysts, who wish to restore the possibility of meaningful religious discourse about the divine, have responded by insisting that the only way out of the dilemma is to jettison analogy and the ontological difference in favor of univocal predication at a certain level of abstraction. William Alston, who is a proponent of this view, further argues that we can find in traditional thinkers such as Aquinas the basis for the same sort of a move, even if it is not fully acknowledged or recognized. According to this view, metaphysics can be successful in describing the divine substance and its attributes only if we reject analogy in favor of univocity.

## II: Alston and Aquinas on analogy and divine predication

In his commentary on Book 4 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, St. Thomas gives an account of univocal, equivocal and analogous predication. A term is predicated univocally of two things when it is used in the same sense in both cases. It is predicated equivocally if each use of the term has a different sense. If the uses of the term are partially the same and partially different at the same time we say that it is used analogously. (Met. 4.1, ¶535) Professor Blanchette does not reject Thomas' definition, but he argues that, as a definition of analogy, it falls well short of the mark. As he notes, "truly analogous thinking reaches out beyond univocity...[to] the greater intelligibility and clarity of being." (p. 10) There is reason to think that St. Thomas would agree with Blanchette on this point. Being is the first and most evident of all our concepts. Aquinas is neither John Duns Scotus, who regards the unity of the concept of being as requiring univocity, nor Henry of Ghent, who regards the unity of being as established only by a confused concept which abstracts from the ontological difference between God and creatures. Aquinas resists both a vague concept of being and the reduction of analogical predication to abstract univocal predication in the case of terms applicable to God and creatures.

Nevertheless, his position opens up a possible difficulty, which prompts Bill Alston to argue that either Aquinas must embrace univocity at some level or sacrifice the truth preserving nature of divine predication. Alston asserts that, despite his stated commitment to irreducible analogy, one can only make sense of Aquinas' actual claims about the validity of inferring divine predicates from human ones if we grant that analogical terms can be unpacked into univocal and equivocal elements. This is precisely what Blanchette regards as a case of employing a faulty definition of analogy. A consequence of Alston's argument is that metaphysics must either embrace univocity in order to preserve its unity as a science of being, or it must cease to be a science, because it violates the logical preconditions of being scientific. In essence, Alston is

Blanchette's quintessential analytical philosopher who wishes to reduce all predication to univocity. It is, therefore, worth examining his argument briefly in order to see the challenge it presents for Blanchette's conclusions.

In order to motivate the plausibility of Alston's concerns, it is worth noting that Blanchette claims genuinely analogous thinking, which rejects any attempt to unpack analogical predications into univocal and equivocal sub-parts, must "express sameness and difference at one and the same time." (p. 10) On the face of it, this is a violation of the principle of non-contradiction, an absolute precondition for science as Aristotle argues in *Metaphysics* 4, the very same book in which he introduces analogy as a solution to the problem of the unity of metaphysics. Of course, the doctrine of analogical predication is precisely an attempt to enlarge the meaningful ways in which language can be used to capture genuine stretches of the real. As St. Thomas formulates the first principle of thought in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, "it is impossible for the same attribute both to belong and not to belong to the same subject at the same time." (*In Met.* 4.6 ¶600) This way of formulating the principle raises immediately the possibility of a response to the aforementioned objection. Aristotle's point in the *Metaphysics* is to argue that we must reject the attempt to find the unity of the science of being qua being in a single essence or univocal subject term. Analogical predication, therefore, does not predicate incompatible attributes of precisely the same quiddity at the same time. It enlarges our conception of the nature of the subject of metaphysics by pointing to meaningful predications in cases where no univocal terms can be found.

In response to this imagined rebuttal, it must be noted that metaphysics as a science does not seek only to predicate terms meaningfully in individual instances, but also to maintain the inferential relationships necessary between terms for its status as a science. Thus, for instance, one must be able to infer meaningful relationships between divine and human being, as well as between the being of substances and accidents. Here the principle of non-contradiction must operate across the range of terms that refer to entities treated by a science, not only apply them to individual property ascriptions. If we cannot unpack analogical predications into univocal and equivocal sub-parts, then it appears we cannot control with clarity how apparent contradictories such as "sameness" and "difference" apply among analogous uses of terms for God and creatures. We may, therefore, be able to speak meaningfully, though imperfectly, about the divine being with regard to a certain attribute by means of analogical predication, but we cannot rely upon the logical relationships that hold between a series of terms describing attributes of human beings to make valid inferences in the case of the divine being. If Alston is correct, we can only do this in cases where we can unpack analogous terms into univocal and equivocal sub-parts. This is not to say that irreducibly analogous predications are meaningless, as some analysts within the logical positivist tradition may have previously maintained. Analytical philosophers working in the wake of more subtle thinkers such as Wittgenstein recognize that the conditions for meaningful discourse are more complex than the criterion of verifiability and logical atomism had previously maintained. It is only to say that the unity of a science requires a higher standard that is apparently jeopardized by the sense in which analogous predication enlarges our understanding of the application of the principle of non-contradiction. This explains why

Wittgenstein's return to ordinary language and the concept of family resemblance is accompanied by a refusal to consider philosophy as a systematic or scientific enterprise.

If the thread of this argument seems unclear, perhaps some concrete examples will help to illustrate the difficulty I am formulating for Blanchette's insistence upon a more thoroughgoing and irreducible conception of analogy as the basis of the unity of the science of metaphysics. Consider the case of the divine attributes of perfection and goodness as Aquinas discusses them in the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. St. Thomas always pays careful attention to pedagogical details. According to the Prologue to Question 4, we should consider first God's perfection and then His goodness, because "everything insofar as it is perfect is called good." (ST I.4.prol.) Aquinas goes on to say, however, that God's perfection and our perfection are radically different. The term "perfect" indicates something that is "completely made." (obj. 1) Clearly, this conception of perfect does not apply to the uncaused first principle of everything. Furthermore, Aquinas notes the Pre-Socratic philosophers did not attribute perfection to the first principle, because they were thinking of first material principles, which are most imperfect. (corpus) God is neither perfect in the way that human beings are perfect, nor in the way that material principles are completed. Aquinas offers a more general conception of perfection, which applies to God: "a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, because we call that perfect which lacks nothing according to the mode of its perfection." (corpus) Have we arrived at a univocal concept of perfection? No, we have not, precisely because of the ontological difference between God and creatures. As Aquinas stresses in the third article of question 4, creatures are neither exactly like God, since they do not share the same form with Him, nor like God according to some numerically specifiable proportion of greater and lesser. (ST. I.4.3 prol.) The relationship is irreducibly analogous. Furthermore, the specification of God's perfection is made in relation to His actuality, so there is no sense in which the *ratio* or nature of human perfection specifies the *ratio* or nature of divine perfection. It remains that we can predicate perfection of God and creatures *meaningfully* but we cannot *comprehend* (in the technical sense of the term) divine perfection.

So far as it goes, this looks like a perfectly satisfactory resolution of the problem of divine predication based upon terms which take their original meaning from human contexts. If we insist that divine and human predicates are univocal, we will appear to compromise divine transcendence, especially divine simplicity. If we embrace a purely negative theology, then referring to God will turn out to be merely creating irreducible metaphors that treat God as a figment of our own imaginations, but fail to access His reality. Revealed theology and metaphysics will become self-enclosed language games. The *via media* between these two untenable positions would appear to be analogical predication.

A difficulty arises, however, when we think of the move from perfection to goodness. God is good in so far as He is perfect and perfect in so far as He is actual. We can infer God's goodness from His perfection because that relationship has already been established, but what relation does divine goodness bear to human goodness and can we infer anything about that relationship from the nature of human perfection, for example, from the nature of the moral and

intellectual virtues? Alston suggests a further problem. From the fact that “God wills that we do x,” can we infer that “we ought to do x because the divine will ought to be obeyed?” Well, of course, that depends upon our understanding of what the divine will is and how it is established. From the human point of view, of course, we will things because we view them as choice worthy, and, provided that our wills are properly rectified, what we will is a good thing to happen. Thus, the reasonable will of persons who have properly cultivated the moral virtues should carry weight in our decision-making processes. To what extent do these inferences apply to God?

It seems very difficult to say what the relationship is among divine perfection, divine goodness and divine willing in the absence of a set of univocal terms that apply to God and creatures, especially when we consider the interaction of these three terms in an inferential chain. It may seem preposterous to ask this sort of question, since Aquinas does evidently move back and forth between divine and human predication. But, is this ready movement explicable? One temptation is to say that it is explicable because analogous predications are partly the same and we are slipping into a more extreme form of equivocity here. But the attempt to specify precisely the sense in which analogous predications are alike, so that we can establish the truth conditions for inferences from human to divine predicates, appears to run afoul of Blanchette’s idea that analogy transcends a reduction to partial univocity and partial equivocity. On the other hand, failure to specify these truth conditions for inferences, although it will not render theological predication necessarily meaningless, will tend to compromise the character of metaphysics as a science.

Alston’s inclination is to choose the horn of the dilemma that leads to a reduction of analogy to univocity in order to preserve the scientific character of the inferences.<sup>1</sup> This causes him ultimately to reject the doctrine of divine simplicity, which provides the strongest basis for Aquinas’ resistance to univocal predication, but that point is beyond the scope of our present considerations. At present, we should consider only Alston’s attempted reduction. Following Aquinas’ division, he makes a distinction between those terms that are applied properly and substantially to God, and those terms which are applied merely by an analogy of extrinsic attribution. For example, if we can say that medicine is healthy because it is a cause of health, there is an attenuated sense in which we can say that God is a body because He is a cause of bodies. (ST I.13.2c) Such attributions are inherently unsatisfactory because they do not point us in the direction of properties that belong to God intrinsically, or properly and substantially. They are merely relational predicates. There is another class of terms, the so-called “pure perfection” terms, however, that is not merely relational. These terms, which include the transcendentals and other predicates such as wise, loving, perfect, etc. are said to apply intrinsically to God. They apply to the divine substance directly because they pick out some intrinsic aspect of the divine nature and because they admit of a sufficiently high degree of abstraction they do not contain

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<sup>1</sup> See William Alston, “Aquinas on Theological Predication: A Look Back and a Look Forward,” in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 145-178.

within their meaning creaturely limitations. They are terms that belong within the domain of metaphysics because they apply to beings across the ontological spectrum.

At this point in the argument, Alston and Aquinas diverge in their interpretations. Alston entertains the possibility that ‘pure perfection’ terms, shorn of any creaturely limitations, might be sufficient to provide a univocal basis of predication between God and creatures. He acknowledges that Aquinas would be quick to respond to this proposal by reminding us of the ontological difference. As Aquinas does argue, pure perfection terms can be explained in terms of the perfection they signify (the *res* or *perfectio significata*) and their mode of signification (the *modus significandi*).<sup>2</sup> So far as the perfection signified is concerned, Aquinas argues, pure perfection terms are predicated properly and substantially of God. In the epistemological order, the meanings of pure perfection terms (the primary analogate) are derived in the first instance from creatures, in the order of nature, they apply first and foremost to God.

With regard to the mode of signification, however, there is a fundamental difficulty with the application of pure perfection terms to God. For Aquinas, our language is a reflection of the sources of experience from which our thinking is derived. Human experience is accustomed to material substances, things that are complex compositions of form and matter. For us, all concrete subsisting beings are composite and finite. When we refer to simples, such as forms, we use terms that signify abstractly and non-subsistently. There is no mode of signification of our terms that is appropriate to a being that is concrete, subsistent and simple. Because of the inaptitude of the mode of signification, we therefore necessarily refer to the divine attributes as distinct, finite aspects of the divine being, whereas God Himself is simple, infinite, subsistent, and therefore identical with all of the divine attributes. Pure perfection terms are therefore always applied to God imperfectly, even though they do pick out meaningful intrinsic aspects of the divine being.

At this point in the argument, Alston suggests that we make a distinction, which amounts to treating the analogous nature of pure perfection terms as reducible to univocal and equivocal elements. If the lack of synonymy between divine and human predications attaches to the *modi significandi* of these terms, but not to the perfections signified, why not introduce a term such as “gWise” or “gPerfect” or “gGood” that abstracts from the unfortunate mode of signification and captures only the essential content of the perfection signified? He suggests that while Aquinas does not acknowledge this possibility, it looks like what he is in fact doing at certain points in the text. But, this would lead to a startling conclusion:

...if the lack of univocity attaches only to the *modus significandi* side of the matter, there is no room for analogically related senses. For, as we have seen and as Aquinas insists, we can’t change the creaturely mode of signification into one that is suitable for a divine application. ...the best we can do is to lament the fact that “as to the mode of signification, every name is defective.” And as for the *res*

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<sup>2</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I.13 especially article 3. Alston discusses the point at p. 166ff.



*significata* side of the matter, on the present interpretation, that is just fine as it stands; there is no need to look for an analogically related divine sense of the term, so far as that aspect of the meaning is concerned.<sup>3</sup>

Alston thus confirms Prof. Blanchette's suspicion that the definition of analogy in terms of senses of a term that are partially the same and partially different is inadequate and must eventually collapse into equivocation or univocity. Since Alston is willing to embrace univocity himself for theological predication, this point does not deter him from moving forward. In a series of other articles on the topic, he deploys his own version of the univocity approach, using the resources of the analytical tradition in the philosophy of mind called functionalism.<sup>4</sup> Very briefly, his approach is to argue that we can regard the divine attributes as being functionally like human attributes at a very high level of abstraction. When we wish to speak of God as knowing, willing, loving or perfect, therefore, we may do so by extracting a functional account of psychology and anthropology from its creaturely limitations, and applying it to the divine case.

What prevents Aquinas from embracing Alston's approach? If Alston is correct, it is a profound sense of divine transcendence and the doctrine of divine simplicity, along with a stronger view of the connection between concepts and the reality they signify. For Aquinas, God is utterly simple. Semantically, this means that even the perfections signified by our pure perfection terms apply to God imperfectly. Ontologically, it means that there is no sharing of form between God and creatures. Creatures are not like God exactly, or even in some specifiable proportional sense. Alston is content to think of the relation between our language/concepts and the things they signify more loosely than Aquinas. He is also prepared to jettison the doctrine of divine simplicity.

But is that really so simple to do? The answer to that question is, I think, no. Experience of the history of theology teaches us that so many other important points depend upon divine simplicity and transcendence. Furthermore, attempts at univocal reductions in metaphysics have generally been a failure. For these reasons, I am not inclined to think that this stereotypically "analytical" response to Prof. Blanchette's proposal should be embraced easily. On the other hand, what is its attraction? Put succinctly, if we do not embrace it, the inferential relations between terms in the science of being qua being appear to be called into question. Alston comments:

...on the Thomistic interpretation theological statements lack what is required for their intended function. They (1) lack determinate truth conditions and (2) cannot figure in reasoning in the ways they are supposed to...If (1) is valid, that is going to play havoc with any attempt to perform inferences to or from theological statements. If it is indeterminate just what it takes to make a given (putative) statement true, then what follows from the statement...will certainly be

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<sup>3</sup> Alston, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> See William Alston, "Functionalism and Theological Language," in Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, 1989, pp. 64-80.

indeterminate...And if truth goes the game is up for theology, at least on the traditional construal as a discipline [science] that gives us truth about God.<sup>5</sup>

### III: Wittgenstein

Just as Alston provides an example of the stereotypical analytical philosopher, Wittgenstein shows us that there is much more going on beneath the surface in analytical philosophy than we might previously have expected. While the earlier Wittgenstein may have wished to reduce all language to univocal predication, the later Wittgenstein surely recognized that this self-made logical prison failed to capture the suppleness of our language. Some interpreters further argue that his insight was supported by Wittgenstein's basic realism about the world/language relation. What is at stake in these internal disputes is, I think, analogous to the sort of metaphysical concerns expressed in Prof. Blanchette's paper. This is why the difficulties set forth are worth considering in the present context. Of course, they are often not acknowledged as such, in part because analytical philosophers, Wittgenstein included, take a more skeptical view of the possibility of making progress in metaphysics. But, the questions and some of the insights are there, even if the answers are not.

This is why, I think, the line of argument Prof. Blanchette is advancing is a crucial propaedeutic to philosophy escaping the doldrums of the current tension between its analytical and continental streams. As I see it, neither tradition has been able to escape some of the demons of modern philosophy, one of which is the Cartesian turn from Aristotelian common sense realism. It is, therefore, not surprising that systematic philosophy, especially metaphysics, is occasionally admired but seldom practiced in the modern setting. As Prof. Blanchette aptly points out in his book, Heidegger was always working towards a recovery of metaphysics, but did not succeed fully in the task. Perhaps that was because he ultimately remained captivated by an essentialist form of univocal thinking, despite his intuition that we must recover our awareness of the 'be of beings.' Contemporary philosophers are forever clearing away obstacles in the landscape of modern philosophy. Prof. Blanchette's argument holds out hope for a new departure in systematic thinking. If it is to be successful, I think we must be able to answer the skeptical worries of the present age.

Alston invites us to raise some tough questions about how analogy can provide unity to metaphysics and yet have it remain a *science* of being qua being. If he is willing to jettison analogy for the sake of a neatly closed system, I am inclined to think that some will see the force in his line of argument, but conclude he has failed to acknowledge the way things really are. That seems to be the point of Prof. Blanchette's assertion in the paper that we must not allow ourselves to be captured by the a priori/empirical distinction, or any other of the analytical means of closing off genuine philosophical efforts to get back to the way things really are. If that is the reader's inclination, he or she will certainly find a fellow traveler in the later Wittgenstein. Disappointed with his earlier efforts in the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein

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<sup>5</sup> Alston, pp. 167-9.

embraced the idea that meaningful language escapes our ability to reduce it to a univocal form of discourse. He introduced the concept of “family resemblance” in order to express the semantic pliability of language. This notion bears a distinct similarity to the Aristotelian and Thomistic doctrine of analogous predication. For this reason alone it is worth some mention. But, it is also worth looking at the Wittgensteinian alternative because for Wittgenstein, ‘family resemblance’ and the associated concept of a ‘language game’ entail repudiation of philosophy as a systematic attempt to explain or interpret reality. In this sense, Wittgenstein would reject the pretensions of metaphysics to be a science, but he would not necessarily reject the idea that ‘first philosophy’ deals with the way things are. Thus, he provides the other horn of our dilemma, holding in some sense for the unity of philosophical discourse, but rejecting metaphysics as a science. As he observed in his later work the *Philosophical Investigations*: “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, nor deduces anything – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain.”<sup>6</sup>

Whether this is a form of common sense realism or a form of skepticism is a matter of some dispute among Wittgenstein scholars. In his earlier work, Wittgenstein relegated just about all non-natural scientific fact stating discourse to the realm of ‘nonsense’, including much of philosophy, which he asserted we should “pass over in silence.” Did he mean to say that the *Tractatus* itself was ‘nonsense’ in the colloquial meaning of that expression or something that could not be captured by the semantic constraints of his logical system? Whatever he meant, he allowed that some things can be *shown* although they cannot be said (or explained). His later interest in language use as a form of practice, evidently takes up where the *Tractatus* left off, making space for the meaningful use of language beyond the narrow confines of his logical system. Language and reality cannot be captured in the philosopher’s univocal box. Thus, I think that Wittgenstein would agree in principle with Prof. Blanchette’s remark that philosophy must not give up analogy. He would disagree with the notion that analogy provides a systematic basis for the construction of metaphysics as a science. Here is where it is worth a comparison with his ideas, since Prof. Blanchette’s purpose is to make a new start in systematic philosophy, to get beyond the therapeutic approach of so many modern philosophers including Wittgenstein.

There is a sense in which one could say that Wittgenstein extrapolates his approach from the sort of concerns Aristotle raises in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book I.6 Aristotle offers a *modus tollens* rejection of the existence of the Platonic idea of the good. He notes:

- If there is a single idea of the good → there is a single science of the good.
  - But, there is no single science of the good, since there are many sciences of individual classes of goods.
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- Thus, there is no single idea of the good.

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<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 126 (hereafter: PI) in Lois Shawver, *Commentary on Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*, URL=<<http://users.rcn.com/rathbone/lwtocc.htm>>

We should note that this *modus tollens* does not license the inference that there is no science of the good because there is no single idea. This would commit an obvious fallacy of denying the antecedent. Perhaps Wittgenstein and others like him make this mistake in rejecting the science of metaphysics? At any rate, Aristotle has other reasons for rejecting a “meta-ethics” of goodness, having to do with the nature of practical sciences. This is significant in Aristotle’s case, because he says that goodness is spoken of in as many ways as being is. (NE 1096a24 ff) There is no single univocal concept of being, but Aristotle argues in the *Metaphysics* there is a science of being qua being. So the considerations in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are not strictly incompatible with the claim Aristotle makes about first philosophy in the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle goes on to reject the notion that there is a single science of the good guided by the idea of the good, because even if there is a single idea of the good, it is not useful in practice. The idea of the good does not do any explanatory work in the individual sciences having to do with various specific kinds of goods. (NE 1096b30 ff)

If we regard the meaningfulness of language as deriving from its use in practice, one can begin to see why Wittgenstein might think that different senses of terms may be meaningfully related by analogous predication, but there is no single science that gives an account or explanation of these analogously related terms, just because that sort of relationship is contrary to the demands of science as such. We can *show* their relationship in language, but we cannot necessarily *say* or give an interpretation of what their relationship is, such as metaphysics attempts to do. Furthermore, it is precisely Wittgenstein’s rejection of the reduction of meaningful discourse to a closed abstract univocal system of interpretation that prompts him to turn to use in practice as the criterion of meaning. In other words, Wittgenstein’s appeal to something like analogy as a criterion of meaning is closely linked to his insistence that philosophy is a non-systematic enterprise.

A passage from the *Philosophical Investigations* discussing the concept of “family resemblance” illustrates this point. In this passage Wittgenstein hypothetically accuses himself of a failure to explain the meaning of his idea that all forms of discourse, including philosophical reflection, constitute different sets of “language games.” He notes: “You [Wittgenstein] talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language” (PI 65). It should be noted that this concept is liable to be misunderstood as connoting necessarily a sort of skepticism or idealism about the relationship between language and thought on the one hand, and the world on the other. Some followers of Wittgenstein do certainly interpret him in this way, arguing that all forms of discourse are constituted as ‘self-enclosed’ language games, having no essential connection with the world. In the analytical philosophy of religion this has led some thinkers to treat theological predication as irreducibly metaphorical, a thesis we saw Alston reacting vigorously against above. But, the concept in itself need not entail this skeptical interpretation. What does it mean? Wittgenstein answers the hypothetical charge with an extraordinary assertion that brings to bear a form of analogous predication:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, -but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships that we shall call them all “language.” (PI 65)

In response to a hypothetical objector who argues that there must be a common essence of language-games, because the term is predicated of them all, Wittgenstein responds, “don’t think, but look!” (PI 66) The very attempt to answer this question by “saying” rather than “showing” falls into the trap of trying to offer a univocal account of the meaning of “language-games.” Perhaps it is stretching his statement too far to say that Wittgenstein is interested in pointing to the ‘be’ of language-games, instead of attempting to reduce the reality to an abstract concept (because it cannot be done). But, it is certainly clear that the analogous nature of the term requires us to understand its meaning in practice rather than by reduction to an abstract concept or general account. Philosophy is non-systematic because it attempts to lay bare everything before us, but the meaning of what it lays bare must be ‘shown’ rather than ‘said’ because the analogous nature of its subject requires us to discover meaning in practice. In this sense, we may begin to understand Wittgenstein’s statement that, “Philosophy simply puts everything before us...” (PI 126).

Wittgenstein introduces the concept of “family resemblance” in order to capture the analogous sense of similarities that philosophy can meaningfully point to, but not fully explain:

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances;” for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and crisscross in the same way.

For Wittgenstein, then, philosophy is a practice or form of life not an abstract system of concepts. The very nature of philosophical practice is demanded by his account of ‘family resemblance’ which is strikingly like the Aristotelian/Thomistic doctrine of analogy.

The lesson I think we should take from these observations is that Wittgenstein’s acknowledgement of a type of analogy provides strong support for Prof. Blanchette’s rejection of attempts to reduce all meaningful philosophical discourse, including metaphysics, to univocity. Indeed, the concept of ‘family resemblances’ allows philosophy to point to meaningful relationships across different individual forms of discourse (or in Aristotelian terms – sciences). But the introduction of irreducible analogy into metaphysical discourse raises a serious question as to whether metaphysics can meet the demands of being a science. Alston is willing to jettison analogy in order to preserve the scientific character of theological predication. Wittgenstein would resolutely object that this move undercuts the richness of language. In order to set the recovery of metaphysics on the right footing and get beyond the modern aporiae that stand in its way, we must, therefore, show that univocal reductions of analogous terms in metaphysics are

not possible *and* that metaphysics can be systematic in spite of this fact. I think Prof. Blanchette's paper is on the mark, because it suggests that analogy is the key to the unity of metaphysics as a science. I would like to hear more about how we can meet these contemporary challenges.

#### IV: A Further Challenge: Anti-realism

One further point is worth making about the challenges that face Professor Blanchette's thesis. One of the most significant dangers lurking at the periphery of Prof. Blanchette's efforts to recover a broadly Aristotelian/Thomistic science of metaphysics is the problem of anti-realism. There are numerous contemporary thinkers in both the continental and analytical traditions who would be ready to embrace the non-univocal character of metaphysical discourse that the paper defends and would, therefore, appear to be sympathetic proponents of Blanchette's position. Their views, however, would be inimical to the ultimate success of his project. I am thinking here of the renewed interest in apophatic theology among some continental thinkers. I also have in mind analytical philosophers, such as Hilary Putnam, who use Wittgenstein's concept of a language-game in order to argue that theological predication makes truth-claims that are internal to a certain practice or form of life, which cannot be defended among others who do not share in the practice. Putnam, takes the truth-claims of his Jewish religious practice seriously, but he thinks that the project of philosophical theology is ill-fated because the meanings of theological predicates are unavailable to those who do not share his particular religious convictions.<sup>7</sup>

While Prof. Blanchette rightly counsels us not to give in to those who would deny the viability of analogical predication, it is important to remain sympathetic to those who desire univocal reductions nonetheless, since they often are motivated by the desire to preserve realism in philosophy over against relativism and anti-realism. It is, therefore, imperative to make the case for analogy as providing the unity of the science of metaphysics in such a way as to engage and respond to the reservations of this group. Alston, for example, is an analytical philosopher who is also a practicing Christian. He has made a good faith effort to think through Aquinas' doctrine of analogy sympathetically, but hesitates to embrace it because of his concern that analogy may force theological discourse into the category of irreducible metaphor and strict equivocation.

In the final analysis, it is my contention that Prof.'s Blanchette's paper is rich and worthy of careful reflection. Furthermore, he shows us the direction in which metaphysics must go if it is to make systematic progress in spite of the therapeutic tendencies of the current age. We must somehow be able to 'have our cake and eat it,' as the old saying goes. Metaphysics must be one despite the non-univocal character of the range of being, and it must be a rigorous form of inquiry. Aristotelian/Thomistic philosophy provides a fruitful context in which this new

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<sup>7</sup> See Hilary Putnam, "Thoughts Addressed to an Analytical Thomist," in *The Monist*, 80:4, October 1997, pp. 487-500.

synthesis can hopefully take place, but we must engage and respond to the serious challenges contemporary philosophy proposes.