

Analogy in Thomas Aquinas and Ludwig Wittgenstein. A comparison

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate the concept of analogy in the late works of St. Thomas Aquinas, i.e., in his two *Summas*, and to go on to compare this with Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" ("Familienähnlichkeit"), in order to reveal some interesting similarities between the named linguistic-philosophical concepts of these two very different thinkers.

Keywords

Aquinas, Wittgenstein, Analogy, Family Resemblance, Familienähnlichkeit

1. Introduction

Like theology, philosophy finds itself obliged to describe things that are radically distinct, as is the case with the non-empirical conditions of the empirical, by using the same language, or, more precisely, the same set of expressions. This confronts both disciplines with a logico-semantic problem.¹

Is it even possible to use concepts that originate in experience to denote things that are beyond empirical investigation? If so, clearly this cannot be done in the same way. But how is it possible to make meaningful utterances about such objects of philosophical investigation in such a way as to preserve the existing differences between them while fashioning the unity that makes knowledge possible?

This problem becomes acute when we come to speak of God, for in the case of Judaeo-Christian faith and theology we have to avoid two perilous extremes, namely, the agnosticism that denies that God can be known in any way, and the pantheism that asserts that God and the reality that surrounds us are one and the same – and

¹ Cf. A. Anzenbacher: *Einführung in die Philosophie*. Vienna 1981, p. 311.

that God can be fully and completely known by direct empirical observation. It was in order to solve this problem that philosophy developed the concept of analogy, or a way of speaking “by analogy”.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate the concept of analogy in the late works of St. Thomas Aquinas, i.e., in his two *Summas*, and to go on to compare this with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblance”. For this purpose I have simplified the doctrine of analogy in places and omitted several technical terms (e.g., act, potency, substance, accident, etc.), since explanation of these would have involved a long detour and diverted us from the topic in hand.

First, however, I shall give a brief, provisional outline of the concept of analogy, followed by a short account of its history, including Aquinas’ development of it.

2. “Analogy” – general definition and historical origin of the concept

The concept of “analogy” comes from Greek; Latin renders it as “proportio” and, later, as the loan-word “analogia”. It means similarity, correspondence, relationship.² Analogy facilitates knowledge by grasping an existent in relationship to some other existent; it reveals or clarifies it by means of a simile or comparison. Thus we say that the runner sped like an arrow; or that the eye is to the body as the intelligence is to the soul. This presupposes, however, that one of the analogates (those exhibiting an analogical relationship with one another) is more familiar than the other, and that there is both an identity and a difference between them. Without identity there would be no possibility of comparing them, and without difference the comparison would be, in fact, merely a repetition communicating no additional new knowledge. (It would be a tautology.)³

In analogy, therefore, we have difference-in-identity;⁴ as the doctrine of analogy it was developed in Scholasticism pre-eminently in the context of our knowledge of God.

Initially the concept of “analogy” arose in mathematics⁵ as a way of defining relationships in sequences of numbers.⁶ Three kinds of mathematical analogies are distinguished: the arithmetic, which

² Cf. J. Schmidt: Article “Analogie“. *Lexikon der Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik* (LEM). Munich 1984, p. 7 f.

³ Cf. J. Lotz: Article “Analogie“, *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, 8th ed., Freiburg 1961, p. 9 f.

⁴ LEM, p. 8.

⁵ Cf. H. Holz: Article “Analogie“, in: Hermann Krings et al. (ed.): *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*. Vol. 1: *Das Absolute – Denken*. Munich 1973, p. 53.

⁶ Cf. W. Kluxen: Article “Analogie“. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie I* (HWPh). WBG Darmstadt, 1971(f.), col. 214 – 227. Cf. also K. Müller: Article “Analogie“,

describes similarities in differences (e.g., $10 - 6 = 6 - 2$), the geometric, which describes relationships that come about through division (e.g., $8 : 4 = 4 : 2$), and finally the harmonic, that combines the two preceding kinds (e.g., $6 : 4 = 4 : 3$).

We have already indicated the use to which analogy can be put in philosophy (and hence in theology), that is, to define relationships where differences are embraced in a unity while these differences are simultaneously preserved.

Plato was the first to use the concept of analogy in philosophy. In his *Timaeus* he understands analogy as a structural principle of the cosmos, as a bond that unites elements (in the material sense) with one another. God orders things in such a way that they are *ἀνάλογα καὶ σύμμετρα*⁷ (*analogia kai summetra*). In the analogy of the “divided line” in his *Republic* he describes correspondences between the sphere of Being and that of knowledge, but he surrenders strict mathematical analogy in favour of simple similarity.

In Aristotle analogy becomes “a useful logical tool for illuminating situations in various fields”⁸. In biology, for instance, the concept can be used to identify similarities in function or structure outside the boundaries of species, according to the model “what wings are to a bird, the fin is to the fish.”⁹

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he uses a scheme of four terms ($a : b = c : d$) to explain the virtue of justice as an analogy of relationships in which everyone gets what is his due.¹⁰ Particularly important for the later doctrine of analogy was Aristotle’s analysis that existing things are spoken of in many ways but always *πρὸς ἓν* (*pros hen*) “with a view to one thing”.¹¹ The classic example is that of food, medicine and facial colour, that are all termed “healthy” in relation to the health of an organism¹² because these things maintain, restore or indicate it. This is therefore a case of difference-in-identity, since “healthy” here refers neither to something identical, nor to things that are diverse. In this connection Aristotle does not yet use the term “analogy”¹³, but nonetheless

in: A. Franz et al. (ed.): *Lexikon philosophischer Grundbegriffe der Theologie*. Freiburg i. Br. 2003, p. 23–25.

⁷ “Ὡσπερ οὖν καὶ κατ’ ἀρχὰς ἐλέχθη, ταῦτα ἀτάκτως ἔχοντα ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἐκάστῳ τε αὐτῶ πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα συμμετρίας ἐνεποίησεν, ὅσας τε καὶ ὅπη δυνατόν ἦν *ἀνάλογα καὶ σύμμετρα* εἶναι.” *Timaeus* 69b (writer’s emphasis)

⁸ Cf. HWPh, col. 216.

⁹ *ibid.*, cf. col. 216 f.

¹⁰ Cf. LEM, p. 8.

¹¹ Cf. R. Teuwsen, *Familienähnlichkeit und Analogie. Zur Semantik genereller Termini bei Wittgenstein und Thomas von Aquin*. Freiburg i.Br.; Munich 1988, pp. 108 - 118, here: p. 109 f.

¹² Cf. HWPh, col. 217.

¹³ Cf. LEM, p. 8.

he is providing the basis for the adoption and further development of analogy that was to feature in High Scholasticism.

3. The concept of analogy in Thomas Aquinas

Now that we have defined the concept of analogy and briefly indicated its historical development we proceed to the concept of analogy in St. Thomas Aquinas. In his activity as a teacher Thomas developed various versions of the theory; this essay restricts itself to his later works, the *Summa Theologica* (STh) and the *Summa contra Gentiles* (ScG) - which is also called the philosophical *Summa* - for it is here that the concept is worked out and discussed in greater detail.

3.1 Definition of the concept of analogy in St. Thomas

Building on the foundational insights of Aristotle, Thomas defines analogy as something between the univocal and the equivocal¹⁴, which we have already described here as “difference-in-identity” (§ 2).

“Univocation” refers to a conceptual identity where a single word, with the same meaning, designates different individuals or objects; thus “dog” can refer to both dachshund and poodle.¹⁵ “Equivocation”, by contrast, signifies a conceptual plurality where the same word denotes different objects and different meanings, e.g., where “cutter” can mean both a sailing vessel and part of a craftsman’s tool.¹⁶

When we call God our Father we do not do so because he is our father in the biological sense. Yet he is not totally remote from what we understand by the word “father” because he behaves towards human beings as a father behaves towards his children (bringing us into being, providing for us and protecting us, etc.).

By drawing this distinction Thomas avoids the danger of two extremes that are contrary to the Judeo-Christian revelation. For if concepts referring to God and creatures were purely equivocal they could neither teach nor show us anything about God; we would

¹⁴ Cf. STh I, 13, 5: “Et iste modus communitatis medius est inter puram aequivocationem et simplicem univocationem. Neque enim in his quae analogice dicuntur, est una ratio, sicut est in univocis, nec totaliter diversa, sicut est in aequivocis; ...”; see also ScG I, 34.

¹⁵ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Einführung in die Philosophie*, Vienna 1981, p. 178.

¹⁶ *ibid.* The English translation of this illustration has to be different, since the German equivocation involves the unrelated words Strauss (a bouquet) and Strauss (an ostrich) (Tr.).

be only misled by a plurality of concepts that would result in agnosticism.¹⁷

On the other hand, if these concepts were purely univocal it would mean that the Creator and creatures would be equal (falling under the same categories), with the result that God would be comprehended in the concept and hence totally knowable. The cause would be equal to its effect, and this would lead to pantheism.¹⁸ Thomas avoids both these extremes, referring¹⁹ to Genesis 1,26, which says, “Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”²⁰

This avoids the equivocation that leads to agnosticism since there *is* a similarity between God and the creature; it is this that makes intelligible discourse about God possible. Yet this similarity does not entail the conceptual univocation that leads to pantheism because the similarity between God and the creature is imperfect. We are left with analogous discourse as the appropriate way of speaking about God.

3.2 The doctrine of analogy in St. Thomas

In the *Summa contra Gentiles* (and *Summa Theologica*) – in contrast, for instance, to his *Quaestio “De Veritate”* – Thomas distinguishes only two ways of speaking analogously of God and things. First, “according as many things have a relation to some one thing”²¹; and secondly “according as order or relation of two things may be observed, not to some other thing, but to one of them.”²²

Thomas explains the first kind of analogy by the classic example of the concept “healthy”.²³ Where the health of a living being is concerned, medicine, food and urine are all called “healthy” since they either bring about, maintain or indicate health.

¹⁷ Cf. STh I, 13, 5: “Sed nec etiam pure aequivoce, ut aliqui dixerunt. Quia secundum hoc ex creaturis nihil posset cognosci de Deo, nec demonstrari, sed semper incideret fallacia aequivocationis. ”

¹⁸ Cf. STh I, 13, 5: “Respondeo dicendum quod impossibile est aliquid praedicari de Deo et creaturis univoce. Quia omnis effectus non adaequans virtutem causae agentis, recipit similitudinem agentis non secundum eandem rationem, deficienter; . . . ”

¹⁹ Cf. STh I, 13, 5: “Ad secundum dicendum, quod similitudo creaturae ad Deum est imperfecta; quia etiam nec idem secundum genus repraesentat, ut supra dictum est (quaest. IV, art.3).“; see also auch K. Müller, *Thomas von Aquins Theorie und Praxis der Analogie*, Frankfurt-Bern-New York 1983, p. 106.

²⁰ Revised Standard Version.

²¹ ScG I, 34, *The Summa contra Gentiles*, literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers, Aeterna Press 2014, p.49.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.* p.50.

In the case of the second kind of analogy it is no longer a question of the relationship of at least two to a third, but of prioritizing one member over another. Here again, however, Thomas uses the concept of “healthy”. Of its nature the healing power (*virtus sanandi*) that resides in the medicines (*sanativa*) is prior than the health of the living being since the cause is prior to the effect. Yet “as we know this power only through its effect, we name it from that effect.”²⁴ “Wherefore He[God] is said to be named from His effects.”²⁵ In this second mode of analogical discourse, therefore, knowledge of God is possible through created things.

3.3 The meaning and possibility of analogical predication

In the *Summa Theologica* Thomas repeats and elucidates the thesis we have presented under §3.2: “For we can name God only from creatures. Thus, whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently.”²⁶

St. Thomas’s concept of analogy is firmly embedded in a metaphysics in which all created things are in a relationship of priority and subordination “with a view to one thing”. As we showed in §2, this relationship was already worked out by Aristotle; it was interpreted by later Christian writers as a sharing in the being of God (ontological participation).²⁷

The relationship between God and the creature is defined as a causal one (see above), as creation; insofar as creatures participate in the being of God, meaningful analogical predication is possible; i.e., it is possible to define the attributes (predicates) of an object/thing.

3.4 Linguistic dimensions of the doctrine of analogy of St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas does not see himself as a linguistic philosopher, and accordingly his *Summas* contain no treatises dealing specifically

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *STh I*, 13, 5; translation by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger NY 1948.

²⁷ *HWPh*, col.219. See also K. Müller: Article “Analogie”, in: *Lexikon philosophischer Grundbegriffe der Theologie*, p. 23–25.

with the philosophy of language²⁸; but he does present a wealth of brief reflections on language theory and practice.²⁹

These reflections, like the attention he devotes to analogy and the further development of the doctrine of analogy, are not undertaken for their own sake. In fact they have a thoroughly practical purpose: on the one hand their aim is to present theology as a meaningful discourse about God, and on the other Aquinas's *Summas* are conceived as theological and philosophical textbooks to help the reader follow the teachings explained there and to elucidate the structure of their arguments.³⁰

It is essential to read the text of the *Summas* carefully, especially the *Summa Theologica*, and attend to things that may seem obvious, for Thomas is a master of the word, very precise in his formulations and choice of words. His use of language is cautious and balanced because he knows that even the way it is used contributes to the communication of knowledge. The choice of words often gives important indications as to how a particular content is to be understood.³¹ It happens frequently that the boundaries of language are narrower than the scope of the message; this too makes it essential to be judicious in using words.³² Furthermore, as we have indicated (§3.1), concepts are not applied to God and the creature in the same meaning, for univocation in concepts leads to pantheism.

As a result, when Thomas takes concepts from experience and uses them in speaking analogically about God, he expands them so that they show a certain blurring of outline; i.e., their similarity with their referent is reduced so that theology in the Christian sense may take place successfully.³³ It is precisely because of this blurred outline that the chosen predicates fulfil their linguistic function: discourse about God is indeed imprecise, but thoroughly meaningful. Thus the lack of precision of analogous discourse is the result of a very precise semantical procedure.

Since a detailed analysis of St. Thomas's theory and practice of the doctrine of analogy would exceed the scope of this essay, we shall restrict our presentation of this topic to one example from

²⁸ Cf. K. Müller: *Thomas von Aquins Theorie und Praxis der Analogie*, Frankfurt-Bern-New York 1983, p. 91 f.

²⁹ K. Müller: *Lecture I Winter Semester 97/98: Kritik und Kommunikation. Grundfragen der Erkenntnistheorie, der Sprach- und Medienphilosophie. 2.2 Analogie*.

³⁰ K. Müller: *Thomas von Aquins Theorie und Praxis der Analogie*, Frankfurt-Bern-New York 1983, p. 91.

³¹ K. Müller: *Lecture I Winter Semester 97/98: Kritik und Kommunikation. Grundfragen der Erkenntnistheorie, der Sprach- und Medienphilosophie. 2.2 Analogie* (unpublished manuscript).

³² *ibid.*

³³ Cf. A. Anzenbacher: *Einführung in die Philosophie*, p. 312.

the *Summa Theologica* (STh I, 13,5).³⁴ Here Thomas says that in calling someone “wise” we are referring to something that is to be distinguished from the person’s nature, power and being. A man *can* be wise, but he is not necessarily so (as is proved by the existence of foolish people). When we call God wise, however, we are not identifying something different from his nature, power and being (since God is the source of all wisdom, and man is wise insofar as he participates in God’s wisdom).

When we call a man “wise”, we define and grasp what that means – more or less. With God it is otherwise, since the wisdom of God, in its absoluteness, remains uncomprehended and transcends the attributed meaning. So the term “wise”, applied to God, does not have the same meaning as when applied to men.³⁵

Aquinas imparts a certain imprecision to the concept “wise” by saying that, in the case of human wisdom, this predicate defines and grasps the person “in a certain way” (“quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendit”). In fact the word “wise” (*sapiens*) already shows a certain lack of precision: as used in everyday speech it is not a clearly-defined concept. The qualifier “in a certain way” (*quodammodo*) also obstructs precise predication.

When Thomas applies the concept “wise” to God, it acquires another meaning that both recalls and contradicts its attribution to men: by calling God “wise” we are referring to something in God that is *not* distinct from his nature, power and being. As we have said, man is in a certain way defined and grasped by the predicate “wise”. God, however, transcends the meaning of this predicate and remains uncomprehended. St. Thomas does not give a positive definition of the concept “wise”. He does not say what “wise” means as applied to God (as compared to what it means when applied to man); indeed, he cannot since, as we saw in §3.1, God cannot be grasped in concepts. Thomas merely states that there is a difference. The fact that this concept has one meaning when applied to man and another (“... non autem...; sed...”) when applied to God, makes it clear that the meaning of a word is dependent on its context; i.e., a word can have different

³⁴ Cf. K. Müller, *Thomas von Aquins Theorie und Praxis der Analogie*, Frankfurt-Bern-New York 1983, p. 102.

³⁵ Cf. STh I, 13, 5: “... cum hoc nomen, sapiens, de homine dicitur, significamus aliquam perfectionem distinctam ab essentia hominis, et a potentia, et ab esse ipsius, et ab omnibus hujusmodi. Sed cum hoc nomen de Deo dicimus, non intendimus significare aliquid distinctum ab essentia, vel potentia, vel esse ipsius. Et sic, cum hoc nomen, sapiens, de homine dicitur, quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendit rem significatam; non autem cum dicitur de Deo; sed relinquit rem significatam ut incomprehensam et excedentem nominis significationem. Unde patet quod non secundum eandem rationem hoc nomen, sapiens, de Deo et de homine dicitur.”

meanings that must be distinguished from one another according to context.³⁶

Because of this linguistic imprecision it is possible to apply the concept “wise” analogically to both God and man, i.e., in a difference-in-identity where imprecision is meaningful.

4. The concept of family resemblance in Ludwig Wittgenstein

Having presented the doctrine of analogy of St. Thomas Aquinas, with particular attention to its linguistic dimensions, we now turn to the concept of family resemblance in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (PU) which, as we shall see, likewise contain a kind of analogical predication. Here too we shall consider the concept from the vantage-point of linguistic philosophy, before concluding with a comparison of the approaches of Wittgenstein and Aquinas.

4.1 Presentation of the concept of family resemblance in Ludwig Wittgenstein

What linguistic phenomenon is Wittgenstein referring to with his concept of “family resemblance”, and what ideas lie behind it? This can be explained by examining the activities we call “games”.³⁷

If we think about board-games, card-games, ball-games, competition games, etc., it is impossible to say exactly what they all have in common; yet we can observe a series of resemblances and relationships. Board-games have a lot in common; if we compare

³⁶ The two principles familiar to St. Thomas in the analysis and constitution of meaning, which he uses in his reflections on the use of language, are the principle of similarity and the principle of difference. Here he explains the former by taking our use of the word “wise”. By the principle of similarity, we expand the meaning of a word while preserving its original meaning. The boundaries of meaning are opened up, which results in the blurring of outlines in language, of which we have already spoken. The second principle, the principle of difference, is the opposite of the principle of similarity, since it requires the limiting of the meaning of a concept by the introduction of distinctions (differences). Thus one begins with “proper” (*proprie*) and “improper” (*improprie*) meanings, and proceeds to ever more complicated nuances. (This was a speciality of scholasticism that ultimately led to the exaggerated hairsplitting of Neoscholasticism.) On this see K.Müller, *Lecture I*, Winter Semester 97/98: *Kritik und Kommunikation. Grundfragen der Erkenntnistheorie, der Sprach- und Medienphilosophie*. 2.2 *Analogie* (unpublished manuscript). See also K.Müller, article “Analogie” in: *Lexikon philosophischer Grundbegriffe der Theologie*, p. 25.

³⁷ *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (PU) [*Philosophical Investigations*] I, 66.

them with card-games we find many correspondences, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.

What do all these things have in common, so that we refer to them all as “games”? Are they all “amusing”? Compare chess with nine men’s morris. Is it always a case of winning and losing, of competition between players? Think of patience, or of a child throwing a ball against a wall: the competitive feature has disappeared. Or compare the skill demanded by chess with that required in tennis.

We could continue listing these examples, but what is happening is clear: similarities keep appearing or vanishing. Between all games there is “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.”³⁸ Wittgenstein characterises these similarities as “family resemblances” because “the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way.” And, he adds, “games form a family.”³⁹

A concept can be used within strict limits for a particular purpose, but this must be precisely defined in advance. But it can also be used “so that the extension of the concept is *not* closed by a frontier.”⁴⁰

How does one close or limit the concept of “game”? When is something still a game, and when isn’t it?

Normally the word “game” is used without limitation because no limits can be given; something is called a game if it is similar to what has been called a game in previous experience.⁴¹ This is a general rule in language: concepts are used without being precisely defined by the speaker,⁴² because they have no fixed boundaries.⁴³

We name something unknown by comparison with something already known,⁴⁴ provided there are sufficient similarities. Concepts

³⁸ PU, I, 66.

³⁹ PU, I, 67.

⁴⁰ PU, I, 68.

⁴¹ Cf. PU, I, 67 and 68.

⁴² Wittgenstein has the same difficulty when he tries to describe the linguistic phenomenon he calls “family resemblance”; he has to engage in lengthy explanations and adduce a range of examples (game, number) and metaphors (network, relationship, and hence “family resemblance”). On Wittgenstein’s method cf. PU, I, 69.

⁴³ Cf. PU, I, 69.

⁴⁴ Cf. PU, I, 67: “Why do we call something a ‘number’? Well, perhaps because it has a – direct – relationship with several things that have hitherto been called ‘number’.”

are ultimately nothing other than “combinations of individuals (objects, events, etc.) according to common viewpoints.”⁴⁵

Here are two simple examples to illustrate the process of naming the unknown by comparison with the known.

A dwelling will be referred to as a “house” even if someone has never seen it, even if it happens to be a designer project that departs considerably from conventional house-types, so long as it bears some relation to what the observer has previously understood by the word house.

When the Spanish *conquistadores* reached South America, the indigenous inhabitants had no word for the sailing vessels in which the Spaniards arrived. They called them simply “swimming houses”. They had never seen a sailing ship and so had no concept for it, but they found a “family resemblance” with their wooden houses and so used the same concept, by analogy, for the ships.

5. Analogy in Aquinas and family resemblance in Wittgenstein – a comparison

In conclusion we compare the theory and practice of the doctrine of analogy in St. Thomas Aquinas, as presented in this essay, with the linguistic phenomenon called “family resemblance” by Wittgenstein.

The two concepts exhibit a series of common features, beginning with their terminologies. Wittgenstein (PU I,66) speaks continually of “similarities” and once he even uses the word “correspondences”; the Latin word for this is “proportio” or the Greek loan-word “analogia”. Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblances is thus formally the same as the concept of analogy presented in §2 above.

There is also common ground in linguistic theory and practice. Wittgenstein’s observation that concepts normally have no fixed boundaries but are combinations of objects according to common viewpoints (“*Verwandtschaften*” – relationships) is familiar to St. Thomas and is employed by him in his two Summas.⁴⁶

It is this very insight that renders analogical discourse about God possible, for in the absence of this imprecision (“blurring”) in the predicate it would be impossible to speak of God at all.

⁴⁵ LEM, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Cf. our remarks (§3.4) on the analogical use of the concept “wise” (*sapiens*). Thomas is aware of the imprecise nature of this predicate, but actually intensifies it and uses it for meaningful discourse about God.

(God, in his transcendence and absoluteness, cannot be defined and “confined” in narrow, limited concepts, cf. §3,1 and §3.4.)

Wittgenstein’s understanding of concepts, i.e., that they operate by naming the unknown from the known, also applies to our speaking of God, as Thomas shows: Why is God called “wise”? Because man’s notion of a particular attribute of God bears some relation to what he has already understood by the concept “wise”. The particular and scalable imprecision in the concept permits this predication without incurring the dangers of univocation.

The theologian, therefore, is in a similar case as the indigenous inhabitants discovered by the Spanish: he has to give a name to something for which he has no appropriate term, and must search his vocabulary and his experience to find something that comes as close as possible to it. In this he is helped by family resemblances or (what is synonymous) analogies.

There is much in common between analogical concepts as understood by Thomas Aquinas and by Ludwig Wittgenstein, but there are also differences between them. These arise because Thomas Aquinas is primarily a theologian and Wittgenstein is a linguistic philosopher. Aquinas is chiefly concerned with the practical use of analogy in meaningful discourse about God; he is familiar with the theory and employs it, but he does not go into great detail from the point of view of linguistic philosophy.

It is important that St. Thomas’s concept of analogy is firmly embedded in a metaphysics in which all created things are in a relationship of priority and subordination “with a view to one thing”. The relationship between God and the creature is defined as causal; analogical predication is possible insofar as creatures participate in the being of God (§3.3).

This metaphysical structure is of no concern to Wittgenstein, since analogy and family resemblance operate without it. For him, the meaning of analogical predication rests on experience and comparison (the unknown is named from the known). As a linguistic philosopher Wittgenstein goes into much more detail in his theoretical assessments; in his *Philosophical Investigations* he devotes himself to these topics, illustrating them with examples and metaphors. Thomas, in contrast, sets forth his view by using it and reflecting upon that use (§3.4).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The German original version of this article has been published by the author under the following title: *Ludwig Wittgenstein und Thomas von Aquin über Analogie, Eine vergleichende Gegenüberstellung*, GRIN Verlag, München 2016. The article has been translated into English by Graham J. Harrison.

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