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Necessity, Univocism, and the Triune God: A Response to Anderson and Welty

Nathan D. Shannon
Department of Philosophy
Saint Joseph's University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Abstract: In this paper, a critical response is offered to James Anderson and Greg Welty's "The Lord of Noncontradiction" by drawing attention to oft-neglected distinctions (e.g. *de re* and *de dicto* necessity), the limits of some explanatory categories (possible worlds) relative to revealed theology, and the philosophical import of evangelical theological commitments (for example, that God is not essentially creator).

Introduction

In a recent article entitled "The Lord of Noncontradiction," authors James N. Anderson and Greg Welty argue that "the very idea of logical laws presupposes the existence of God."¹ They claim, therefore, that "one can logically argue against God only if God exists" (337). They summarize their argument this way:

In summary, the argument runs as follows. The laws of logic are necessary truths about truths; they are necessarily true propositions. Propositions are real entities, but cannot be physical entities; they are essentially thoughts. So the laws of logic are necessarily true thoughts. Since they are true in every possible world, they must exist in every possible world. But if there are necessarily existent thoughts, there must be a necessarily existent mind; and if there is a necessarily existent mind, there must be a necessarily existent person. A necessarily existent person must be spiritual in nature, because no physical entity exists necessarily. Thus, if there are laws of logic, there must also be a necessarily existent,

¹ James N. Anderson and Greg Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic," *Philosophia Christi* 13 no. 2 (2011): 338. Subsequent citations from this article are given in the text.

personal, spiritual being. The laws of logic imply the existence of God (336-7).

And they add this in a footnote: “But not necessarily a *unipersonal* God; the conclusion of the argument is entirely compatible with Trinitarianism. Strictly speaking, the argument shows that there must be *at least one* necessarily existent person; it does not show that there must be *one and only one* necessarily existent person” (337 n.33).

I appreciate what AW do in this article, and I think their argument has a number of strengths. I endorse wholeheartedly their conclusion as stated above, with the caveat that “God” refer only to the *a se*, triune, Christian God. AW use the term more loosely in this article.² Specifically, I agree that for the consistency and reliability of the laws of logic, to account for the necessity of the laws of logic, in other words, those laws must be understood as consistent with the nature of a necessary and self-consistent being. And that's just where I would part ways with AW: the triune personal creator God is the standard and original of self-consistency, not the other way around; and AW's argument does things the other way around. The result is a vague and spurious and decidedly finite theism.

I will point out a few weak links in their argument in what follows, but the most prominent misstep, in my view, is univocism. AW's argument incorporates a univocal notion of necessity and, by implication, of being.³ Consequently, whatever god their argument proves is a correlate of the created order, not the creator God of Christian theism. “Lord of Noncontradiction” reaffirms a claim long uncontested in Christian thought: univocal reason destroys true theism.

I raise a number of objections here. First I focus on AW's handling of the notion of necessity which meets at least two difficulties before the problem

² They say “the very idea of logical laws presupposes the existence of God,” but “not necessarily a unipersonal god” (338, 337 n.33). The salient fact then is that whatever “God” means, it does not mean “the God of Christianity.” So “God,” throughout “The Lord of Noncontradiction,” is not a proper noun and should be spelled “god” or “god(s),” using the lower-case g. To use the upper-case is misleading.

³ Christian theology has long rejected the univocal use of terms on the grounds that it implies a univocal notion of being. More recently, Vern Poythress has argued that Aristotelian logic implies a unitarian ontology and that it therefore stands in a complicated relationship with revealed theology. See “Reforming Ontology and Logic in Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Notion of Analogy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 no.1 (1995): 187-219; and his forthcoming *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

of univocism is in play. Then I raise a few theological concerns, focusing on problems that arise ultimately from univocal reason about God.

AW on Necessity

Ambiguity. AW say that the laws of logic are necessarily true.⁴ Then they say that the laws of logic “really exist,” “that is, they are real entities in the same sense that the pyramids of Egypt are real entities” (327), and then, that, since “whatever exists, exists either *contingently* or *necessarily*,” clearly the laws of logic are of the latter kind: they exist necessarily (331-2). The reasoning is this: If a proposition is necessarily true, and propositions exist, a necessarily true proposition exists necessarily. Note the equivocation: the metaphysical property, *existing necessarily*, replaces the propositional property, *being necessarily true*; *de dicto* necessity is swapped for *de re* necessity, but these are not the same thing at all. AW offer no argument for the *de re* necessity of the laws of logic or necessarily true propositions. Benefiting from this ambiguity, AW's argument slips smoothly from the realm of contingent being to the realm of necessary being; but the transition is spurious. We can see the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* necessity in a couple of ways directly related to AW's argument.

One way is by drawing a clear distinction between propositions and their objects—what propositions are 'about'—and understanding how a proposition and its object are related. We'll see that propositions are distinct but inseparable from their objects, and that the modality they attribute, necessity in this case, is distinct from the modality (or the necessity) they possess.

Take the law of identity ($A=A$). Is it necessarily true? What would make the proposition 'necessarily, $A=A$ ' true? It would have to be the case that, necessarily, $A=A$. A's being necessarily identical to A is the necessary condition of the law of identity's being necessarily true; and since the latter is essentially dependent upon the former, the proposition on the state of affairs, clearly they are distinct. The important difference between the two is that the law of identity has *de dicto* necessity, while A's being identical to A has *de re* necessity.

To put it another way, a proposition is essentially 'about' something, as AW note; propositions are essentially intentional (333-5). (This quality of intentionality or 'aboutness' serves AW as the link between propositions and

⁴ “. . . they are *necessary* truths. This is just to say that they are true propositions that could not have been false” (325). I worry that AW confound the categories of necessary truth and tautology. That “. . . we cannot imagine any possible circumstances in which a truth could also be a falsehood” does not point us in the direction of a state of affairs necessarily obtaining, but in the direction of tautology (ibid.).

personal minds.⁵) So a proposition is essentially parasitic on whatever it is about. Apart from the thing it is about, a proposition has no referent and no meaning and thus cannot bear truth-value.⁶ The law of identity is an attribution, a *de dicto* sort of thing, of *de re* necessity to the state of affairs $A=A$, but the attribution itself—the law, the proposition—can have only *de dicto* necessity.

In an attempt to make them more like the sorts of objects that can have *de re* necessity, AW affirm that the laws of logic exist; but this is irrelevant. Real existence, particularly mental, intentional real existence, does not change the fact that the modality of propositions, just like their truth-value, is derivative and dependent upon a state of affairs distinct from any proposition 'about' that state of affairs. Quite the contrary. Affirming the mental existence of propositions in fact emphasizes the intentional and thus derivative nature of propositions and confirms that the modality of a proposition is merely *de dicto*.

Now a second way. AW also confuse *de re* and *de dicto* necessity by failing to distinguish between a proposition's being true *at* a possible world and a proposition's being true *in* a possible world. To be true *in* a possible world, a proposition must exist in that world; to be true *of* or *at* a possible world, the proposition need only describe that world. A proposition can be true of a possible world without existing in it. AW blur this distinction: “. . . the law of noncontradiction is true not only in the actual world but also in every possible world” (325). To say that the LNC is true *in* every possible world rather than *at* every possible world, is to affirm that it exists in every possible world (and thus to beg the question); and this is to affirm both *de dicto* and *de re* necessity without distinguishing the two. The next sentence reads: “There is no possible world in which that logical law is false (or fails to be true in any other way)” (325-6). Here again, *de dicto* and *de re* are confounded. If there is no possible world in which the law of noncontradiction is false, it does not follow necessarily that the LNC is true *in* all possible worlds. For to not be false, a proposition does not have to exist; a proposition might not exist at all and still be not false. But to not fail to be true, it must exist. A proposition's not being false does not imply that proposition's necessarily existing. AW follow this a

⁵ “There is a good reason to regard intentionality as *the distinctive mark of the mental*” (334). It would appear at this point that AW affirm both that necessarily true propositions are mind independent and that propositions are essentially “mental.” From this point of view, their argument begins to sound like Berkeleyan subjective idealism, leaving us with this dreary possibility: maybe the created order is only a contingent thought in the mind of God.

⁶ “Philosophers typically use the term 'propositions' to refer to the *primary bearers of truth-value*. So propositions are *by definition* those things that can be true or false . . .” (323).

short time later by saying, “we would simply invite you to reflect on whether you really can conceive of a *possible* world in which contradictions abound” (326). The challenge has no bite, since the nonexistence of the proposition—the thought—'about' the non-contradictoriness of a state of affairs does not imply a world of contradiction. The best way to think that it does is to confuse *de re* and *de dicto* categories and to think that true *in* all possible worlds is the same as true *of* all possible worlds. To be true *in* a possible world, a proposition must exist *in* that world; to be true *of* a possible world, the proposition need only describe that world, but need not exist in it.

And now a third way. What about the possible world at which God chooses not to create, and he alone exists? To my mind, this possible world is the test case for any claim to existence or truth in all possible worlds. At that possible world, I believe we may grant *de dicto* necessity of the laws of logic, maybe, but we are in no way bound to grant *de re* necessity.

To see how, take the most difficult case, conditional propositions—most difficult because they appear to make no metaphysical investment. Take the proposition *If all men are mortal, and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal*. Is this proposition necessary *de dicto*, *de re*, or both? It appears to be true that, at all possible worlds, even worlds in which neither men nor Socrates exist, *if* all men were mortal, and Socrates were a man, he too would be mortal. At, I think, even the possible world which consists of only God, the possible world in which God chooses not to create, this proposition would be necessarily true—*at* that world, that is, *of* it. For certainly God could bring it about that both components of the antecedent obtained, and if he did, then the consequent would obtain as well.

The same proposition does not have *de re* necessity, however, because it is not the case, necessarily, that God thinks “If all men are mortal . . .” So it does not exist necessarily, or *in* all possible worlds, because it does not exist in the possible world which is only God.

According to the doctrines of divine simplicity and aseity, God's mind and thoughts are identical to his being; the only necessarily existing thing, because God did not have to create, is God himself; thus God does not necessarily think anything other than himself. No thought content can be imputed to God essentially, in the possible world which is only God, short of implying that the thought content is identifiable with the being of God. Neither the proposition in question, nor any of the laws of logic, are part of the essential being of God: they are not God. So we might grant qualified *de dicto* necessity of a proposition: the proposition is true in every world *in which it exists*, or even *at* every possible world; but we are not obligated to grant *de re*

necessity to a necessarily true proposition. There appears to be no reason to do so.

I've claimed that this *de re-de dicto* ambiguity affords an easy though illegitimate transition from the contingent order to the necessary, divine order of being. What I mean is this. AW say (1) that necessarily true propositions exist necessarily (and my claim is that they haven't established this), and (2) that propositions are essentially thoughts because essentially intentional or 'about' something. And since "intentionality is a mark of the mental," AW conclude that there must be a necessarily existing mind (one or more).

But notice that if a necessarily true proposition exists necessarily and is necessarily *about* something, one might also conclude that everything a necessarily true proposition is about also exists necessarily. There is no reason that AW have opted to emphasize the subjective side of the necessary existence of propositions as thoughts rather than the objective side of the necessary existence of propositions as thoughts, and thus as essentially intentional or about something, and by implication the necessary existence of their objects—except, perhaps, that it is the best option for their argument (and helps avoid pantheism). By de-emphasizing the object of intentionality, a wedge is driven between the laws of logic and the things they are necessarily 'about'. By thus popping them loose from the tangible world, this procedure gives the obviously false impression that the laws of logic *must* exist, world or no world, granting the laws of logic existence in our test case possible world, God alone.

I'll add that *de dicto* necessity is distinct from *de re* necessity, and propositions are things essentially *de dicto*, with one exception only: God's speaking has *de re* necessity. His word is truth (Jn 17:17) and necessarily accomplishes its purposes (Isa 55:11).

AW's Univocism: Mind, Thought, and Necessity

Univocal mind. Univocal terms imply unitarian ontology. AW use "mind," "thought," and "proposition" univocally. In their argument, all of these terms, familiar to us in the created realm, in the context of our knowledge and familiarity, are applied univocally to the mind and being of the uncreated God. When we say "a thought requires a mind," what do we mean by mind? If no distinction appears, the use of the term suggests that there is one kind of mind; and of that kind, AW argue, there must be at least one which exists in all possible worlds, but that 'necessarily existing' mind is essentially of a kind with minds that exist in only some possible worlds. The "necessary existence" of this mind is no part of its essence, but merely the coincidence of its not failing to exist in any possible world. And the fact that we can distinguish between

minds that exist in all possible worlds and minds that exist in only some does not shake the unitarian ontology because possible worlds themselves are defined in terms of conceivability, or more strictly, in terms of logical consistency; we bounce from one unitarian assumption to another. The necessarily existent mind does not actually exist necessarily; it (or they) exists in every conceivable state of affairs (in the minds of contingent beings). It comes down to this: on this way of framing things, the divine mind(s) exist(s) by virtue of logical necessity; but Christian thought says that logic exists by virtue of God's unique necessity.

Univocal thoughts and propositions. The same can be said for the use of the word “thought.” Propositions, AW say, are thoughts. As all introductory logic textbooks do, AW draw a distinction between sentences and propositions in order to distinguish propositions from time-space linguistic instantiations (sentence tokens or utterances).⁷ Propositions, though certainly linguistic in nature, exist independently of any linguistic instantiations. How AW can remind us that propositions are independent of utterance, and follow that by arguing that thoughts are *not* independent of thinking, I don't see exactly, but for now notice this: these thoughts are identical whether God thinks them or we do.

Univocal necessity. Another problem with the purported necessary existence of the laws of logic involves an oversight regarding possible worlds semantics. Possible worlds semantics have traditionally been used as a way of distinguishing essential from non-essential properties: a property is essential to an entity iff that entity has that property in every possible world.⁸ Leverage for making the distinction between essential and non-essential properties is afforded by the nature of possible worlds: they are complete, logically consistent states of affairs. We say they are logically consistent so as to keep our metaphysics within the bounds of intelligibility. For example, there is no possible world in which a number is a fireman because it would too obviously violate the laws of logic to identify them in any significant way. The point is, there is a reason that possible worlds are defined as logically consistent or conceivable, and that is to serve our metaphysical speculations and ensure their intelligibility.

According to possible worlds semantics, in order to discover whether an

⁷ They add that “. . . propositions, as the *primary* bearers of truth-value, must be *language-independent*” (323). This seems to me misleading, since propositions bear linguistic structure.

⁸ To be more accurate, it should be stated the other way round: an entity has a property in every possible world iff it has that property essentially.

entity has existence essentially or non-essentially, we ask whether there is any logically consistent state of affairs in which that entity does not exist. Since the divine essence and existence are one, for example, we say that God exists in every possible world, that he exists necessarily.

The problem with couching possible worlds in terms of logical necessity should be obvious: it is tautologous to say that the laws of logic are true in all possible worlds, and it is pure stipulation. It clearly indicates that we have reached the explanatory limits of this explanatory category. In other words, possible worlds delineate, by pure stipulation, the boundaries for metaphysical speculation. We who use them for that purpose endorse this surrender to the laws of logic as the most basic and non-negotiable principles of intelligibility; we agree to play by those rules because we can neither find nor imagine any less controversial ones. So possible worlds semantics provides a framework for doing metaphysics. But then to say that everywhere metaphysics is, behold, there are the laws of logic, is to say something obvious and uninformative, even tautologous. It is, in fact, simply to assert logical necessity for the sake of practical necessity.

So there are complications here. But where does that leave the laws of logic? I do not want to deny their 'obvious truth'. But, before moving on, we might ask, in what sense is, say, the law of identity true?

Before we can say much else, we must affirm—indeed, just assume—that there is no equivocation of terms.⁹ A, however we take it, must have the same referent or mean the same thing or have the same distribution each time it makes an appearance. If we do not grant, stipulate, or assume that it does, all is lost, and we can say nothing at all about the truth-value of $A=A$. But this stipulation is the whole game: we find ourselves bound to assume that $A=A$ is true in order for it to serve any purpose whatever—the graceful entrance of an old friend, begging the question. Consequently, if we ask whether or in what sense $A=A$ is true, we have already leaped beyond the threshold of deductive determination, and we may now, and in fact now we must, work on a case by case basis: suppose A is an actual human being, such as Barack Obama. Is Obama identical to Obama? Yes and no; and off you go. Suppose A is the triune personal God of the Bible. Does $A=A$? And off you go. Even in the case of the most inconsequential substitution instance, where A is only itself, an upper-case instantiation of the first letter of the Latin alphabet (in this font) or the 'type' or form of such, there are no simple cases for the obvious and

⁹ We will go ahead and assume that 'A' is a variable and that $A=A$ is not about the identification of two instantiations of the upper-case, Latin letter 'A', in which case it would be obviously false.

plain truth of $A=A$.

The problem of a univocal notion of necessity comes to the fore in cases of apparent paradox. In 2 Kings 6 an axehead floats; it rises to the surface of the waters of the Jordan river. In John 2 Jesus changes water to wine. On a larger scale, there are the problems of freedom and election and of providence and evil. All of these are thought to be at least apparently paradoxical. And the reason for this perception, and for the tremendous efforts it evokes toward resolution, is that it is assumed that notions of logical relations and of logical necessity operate univocally; it is assumed that they apply equally to man and to God. It is assumed that the laws of logic, as we articulate them and have come to understand them, obtain identically or are equally true in all possible worlds, even in eternity past, before creation.

If, however, we confess first the unique ontological self-sufficiency of the triune creator God, and, indeed, the (moral) authority and (epistemological and soteriological) necessity of divine self-disclosure in Scripture, then we always have ready in hand the derivative, dependent, and partial nature of the laws of logic. There is no possible world in which an iron axehead floats; this one did. This is a true or even only an apparent contradiction only if it is assumed that our logical tools exist independently of God, and apply equally to creator and creature.¹⁰

All this raises the suspicion that there is a philosophical assumption afoot that the theologian's methodological commitment to the necessity and authority of Scripture is the product of misplaced piety or personal disinterest in philosophical speculation or maybe even the sheer inability to handle the rigor and subtlety of philosophical discourse. If, on a case by case basis, any of these applies, it is still the church's historic position that acknowledging the authority and necessity of Scripture—the redemptive, faithful, and sovereign self-disclosure of God—are both a theologico-epistemological necessity and a moral-religious imperative.¹¹

Theological Problems Supposing AW's Argument Holds

I'll discuss three theological problems that emerge, supposing AW's

¹⁰ I owe much of what I say here to Vern Poythress.

¹¹ K. Scott Oliphint argues that trinity and inscripturated revelation must be more fundamental in Christian thought even than identity ($A=A$) and the laws of logic. See Oliphint, "Thought Thinking Itself?: Christianity and Logic," <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/thought-thinking-itself-christianity-and-logic.php> (accessed June 19, 2012).

argument holds.¹² One of the deepest issues AW touch upon is the precise relation between the essential being of God and the laws of logic, the relation, that is, between God and the laws of logic in that world which is God alone (and logic). On such a crucial issue, particularly for an argument which claims that the laws of logic exist necessarily in the mind of God, one would expect to find at least a passing reference to something of the wealth of historical literature on the knowledge of God. No such reference appears. Instead we find a strange and incoherent bit of theological fiction: AW say that the laws of logic are “what God thinks about his thoughts *qua* thoughts” (337). The laws of logic are thoughts that God thinks about the form or structure of his own thoughts.

It's likely that the incentive for positing these second order thoughts in the divine mind, distinct from content rich first order thoughts, is largely the preservation of the purely formal nature of the laws of logic, which is crucial to their existing (or being true) necessarily. God *must* think the laws of logic because the laws of logic exist necessarily. So this much is clear: AW are theologizing by the sheer force of logical necessity alone.

In an attempt to maintain pure formality and sustain the notion of necessity they've built their argument upon, AW claim that on some level distinct from his first order thoughts, God thinks exclusively about the form of his first order thoughts. That claim depends on the separability of form and content in God's first order thoughts, which is to lean on a broken reed. For second order thoughts to be purely formal, they must have as their content only the abstracted logical relations of God's first order thoughts. And if the content of first and second order thoughts is distinct, isn't the obvious implication that there are distinct first and second order divine minds?¹³ In that case the second order thoughts and the second order mind, rather than the first order, are more properly said to exist necessarily, as they only are purely formal. And so why not say that God essentially thinks only the laws of logic, and these give form to his other thoughts, should he have any other thoughts? What is God at this point anyway—is he not merely logic thinking itself? Or, put it this way: what now of God's first order thoughts? What are those thoughts *about*? What is the stuff that God subtracts from his thoughts in order to think about

¹² In this section, not only are we supposing that AW's argument holds, we are also supposing that the “God” of their conclusion may be the Christian God (if inclusively of other 'gods').

¹³ We may as well posit a distinct and necessarily existing mind for each necessarily true and necessarily existing proposition. If divine simplicity holds, we have either a single god with many minds or many simple gods.

them *qua* thoughts? And if only thoughts about thoughts *qua* thoughts are necessary, why suppose that God has first order thoughts at all? Aren't these thoughts contingent?

The notion of thoughts about thoughts as thoughts in the divine mind is incoherent. It is also pure fiction, forced upon AW by their commitment to a univocal notion of necessity, and standing in the place where AW should have been led to consult the riches of historical theology in which one finds orthodox protestantism consistently denying that God thinks discursively, infers one thing from another, or has propositional knowledge.¹⁴

I have two more theological concerns. The first is as follows. AW say that “the argument shows that there must be *at least one* necessarily existent person,” but not that “there must be *one and only one* necessarily existent person.” The argument, they point out, “is entirely compatible with Trinitarianism” (337 n.33).

To find in the end that the conclusion is “not incompatible” with the truth is a bit of a let down. Any notion at all of one or more necessary or transcendent mind(s) capable of thinking the laws of logic enjoys the full support of this argument. AW say, “one can logically argue against God only if God exists” (337). This should read, “one can logically argue against X only if X is true, where X is Deism, any form of monotheism or any form of polytheism—as many necessary minds as you like—theistic pluralism, pantheism, absolute idealism, and maybe even a theory of religious self-projection.” AW note that “naturalists eager to evade the force of a theistic

¹⁴ Particularly in terms of knowing and thinking *ad intra*, or particularly in terms of God's necessary or essential knowledge (particularly, that is, at the possible world which is only God). See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Fall of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 3, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 392-402. A distinction is often made between God's thoughts *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In the possible world which is only God, God has no thoughts *ad extra*, obviously. And God's thoughts *ad intra* are only 'about' himself. See *ibid.*, 287ff., 358ff., and 406-10. One historical example is Francis Turretin: “Concerning the intellect of God and the disquisition of his knowledge . . . The mode consists in his knowing all things perfectly, undividedly, distinctly and immutably. . . perfectly because he knows all things by himself or by his essence . . . Undividedly, because he knows all things intuitively and noetically, not discursively and dianoetically . . . Distinctly . . . because he most distinctly sees through all things at one glance so that nothing . . . can escape him . . . Immutably, because with him there is no shadow of change . . .” *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. George Musgrave Giger ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 207. For a contemporary discussion that benefits from historical sources, see also K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 93ff., esp. 94 n.12.

argument will hardly find a comfortable refuge in Absolute idealism” (336 n.32). But an absolute idealist sure might. And AW are too modest: even if the naturalist were eager to evade the force of their argument, he might not be able; he may well *become* an absolute idealist.

I think rather that the deflated conclusion is indicative of a specific presupposition, univocal necessity, and by implication, univocal being. To show how, we might ask how we would go on to argue that this mind is triune and *a se*, rather than singular or plural or just our own (see 336 n.31) or that logic itself is independently eternal (that it exists necessarily independently of a personal mind or minds) or whatever else. Is triunity presupposed by the laws of logic (univocally conceived), or would that require revelation? Would we not have to turn to revelation at that point?—and do the laws of logic imply the self-revelation of God? Do they presuppose the voluntary condescension of the eternal, *a se*, triune, personal God? Do the laws of logic even allow for such a God or for divine condescension and the historical particulars of salvation in Christ? The god(s) this argument purports to prove simply cannot be the Christian God. Once again, my claim is this: reasoning univocally strands our God-talk in the finite order; apart from divine self-disclosure there is true talk of God.

This leads to a third theological concern. According to the doctrine of divine simplicity, God's thoughts are identical to his being. Indeed, AW think this much is true of any mind: “. . . thoughts belong essentially to the minds that produce them” (336 n.31). So if we think thoughts that are essential to God's being—exactly those thoughts that God thinks about his own thoughts as thoughts—are we not participating in the divine essence? The same thoughts—univocal thoughts—belong essentially to our minds and to God's mind. Given simplicity, in other words, unless we deny that our thoughts are ever identical to God's, we flirt with pantheism or apotheosis. Or, hoping to maintain simplicity and the ontological distinction between God and creation, we may say that the laws of logic are abstract objects existing independently of both God and man.¹⁵ In that case, perhaps God knows the laws of logic in all possible worlds because he is omniscient in all possible worlds and the laws of logic exist in all possible worlds, not because he essentially thinks the laws of logic. If that were the case, logic, existing *a se* and governing God's thoughts and actions from without, would be as much God as God is, perhaps more so.

¹⁵ Although the scholarship tends to show that platonism is no friend to divine simplicity. See James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 17-28 (particularly 20-4 and 72-3 n.15 on Plantinga) and 144-7.

Even more troubling is this question: would we be able to affirm in this case that God's Word is essentially—necessarily, in all possible worlds—self-consistent and trustworthy? Or might not divine self-revelation be in at least one possible world illogical or inconsistent at points? And what then of our knowledge of God, if AW's argument holds in all possible worlds, but the Word of God does not?

Christian Theistic Analogical Reason and the Laws of Logic

Traditionally there are three choices in terms of the meaning of theological language: equivocal, univocal, and analogical. AW implicitly reject the thesis that language and concepts are equivocal and say nothing intelligible about God. For readers of this journal, this is uncontroversial. Enjoying equally broad consensus in the history of Christian theology is a rejection of univocism: when we say “God is good” and “John is good,” it is clear that the predicates are not identical.¹⁶

Orthodox protestant thought takes theological language analogically and grounded in verbal divine self-revelation, as Westminster Confession 1.6 indicates: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.” Theology, therefore, is reproductive or imitative of, or obedient to, God's speech about himself. On the basis of the voluntary self-revelation of God, we have true knowledge, and yet, since God is incomprehensible to the creature, our knowledge is never exhaustive.

Add to this the metaphysics of the Creator-creature relationship: the creation is a contingent image of the Creator. All things are from him, to him, and through him (Rom 11:36, indicating aseity); and everything that was created was created by and through the Word (Col 1:6, John 1:3, indicating the triune economy of the act of creation). So we understand our theological knowledge and categories as applying to God truly but incompletely, imitatively and derivatively. So our concepts are analogical. Not only the nature of the relation as analogical, but the order figures in as well: God is the original or the

¹⁶ In a recent text on Aquinas, Brian Davies writes, “We have 'dog,' as in Fido and Rover: univocal. We have 'bank,' as in where I put my money and what is alongside a river: equivocal. And we have, for example, 'good.' When it comes to 'good' as predicated of God and creatures, Aquinas thinks that the word is to be understood analogically. Aquinas does not think that everything we call good is exactly like everything else that we call good. He does not, as I have said, take 'goodness' to be a single property had by all good things.” Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 55.

archetype, and we—and our knowledge—are the analogue, or the ectype. As in any analogy, there is an original and there is an analogue, and the order is irreversible—in the Creator-creature analogy more than in any other. God is the original; we and the created order are derivative. In sum, the irreducible ontological distinction between Creator and creature, and precisely this arch-ec or original-analogue order, give us revelationally grounded, analogical theological predication. We have true knowledge, so we reject equivocism; but because of the 'ontological distance' between the Creator and the creature, our knowledge is ever partial; so we reject univocism.

Specifically in terms of the laws of logic, a brief comment is sufficient to introduce the significance of the creator-creature analogical relationship. The law of identity, for example, is true of the Christian God in the sense that he is self-consistent. But there are complications. While God is self-identical to God, there are differences between the persons such that the Father is not identical to the Son nor to the Holy Spirit and so on. Even the divine substance they share resists easy $A=A$ classification: they share the divine substance, but since each person possesses it in full, we must affirm both identity and difference.

So in Christian thought, triunity is more basic than either threeness or oneness, and more basic than the law of identity. And thus $A=A$ is not true of God without qualification.¹⁷ Nor ought we to endorse too easily a unitarian notion of God's acts. Take salvation, for example. We may speak of a linear economy: the Son offers propitiatory sacrifice to the Father, and this work is applied to the sinner by the Holy Spirit. But salvation is not only these historical particulars, it is also a function of the single, triune decree from eternity. This is a mystery locked to creaturely understanding; the only key to it is another impenetrable mystery, the triunity of God.

Nathan Shannon teaches in the philosophy department at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and he is a PhD candidate in Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. More of his work can be found at www.philosophyandtheism.wordpress.com.

¹⁷ I say here “without qualification,” but I do not mean “without limitation or restriction.” In my view, recognizing the triune foundation of created self-consistency, rather than limiting or depreciating the law of identity, amplifies and enriches it.