

Nowhere Men and Divine I's: Feminist Epistemology, Perfect Being Theism, and the God's-Eye View

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Abstract: This paper employs tools and critiques from analytic feminist scholarship in order to show how particular values commonly on display in analytic theology have served both to marginalize certain voices from the realm of analytic theological debate and to reinforce a particular conception of the divine—one which, despite its historical roots, is not inevitable. I claim that a particular conception of what constitutes a “rational, objective, analytic thinker” often displays certain affinities with those infinite or maximal properties that analytic theologians have taken to be most relevant or essential to their theological conceptions of the divine, and I explore what thinking differently about the former might mean for how we think about the latter and vice versa.

*He's a real nowhere man,
Sitting in his nowhere land,
Making all his nowhere plans for nobody.
Doesn't have a point of view,
Knows not where he's going to—
Isn't he a bit like you and me?
Nowhere man, please listen:
You don't know what you're missing.
Nowhere man, the world is at your command.
He's as blind as he can be,
Just sees what he wants to see.
Nowhere man, can you see me at all?
—The Beatles (1965)*

1. Introduction

Defining the essential features and contours of any disciplinary area is no easy feat, and somewhat ironically it seems to be the fields most concerned with concepts, definitions, and disciplinary “rigor” that have the most difficult time delineating what

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properly belongs to their disciplines and what does not. This has been especially true of fields that include 'analytic' as a modifier—including the field of analytic theology, which combines largely systematic¹ theological perspectives and aims with many of the tools, approaches, concepts, and shared vocabulary of analytic philosophy.² While many analytic theologians appear in practice to have relatively strong intuitions about what they mean when they employ the term, the discipline (at least under this moniker) is still rather young and, I would argue, is still figuring out what it is, as well as what it wants to become.³ Perhaps there is even no single "it" to which the label *analytic theology* "properly" corresponds, and maybe this is just as well. No discipline is a monolith, and in an age of increased interdisciplinary, intercultural, and cross-regional research we might think it a better use of our time to spend less energy devoted to policing disciplinary boundaries and more of our resources to exploring productive resonances (and frictions) between scholars of various academic backgrounds in the pursuit of increased understanding of ourselves, our fellow human beings, and the world around us in all its natural—and potentially nonnatural or supranatural—aspects.

Still, this does not mean that meta-disciplinary reflection is irrelevant, especially when it concerns identifying problematically limiting or exclusionary tendencies in the scholarship and attitudes of scholars who identify themselves with a particular discipline. This paper seeks to engage in just such reflection and, using some of the tools and critiques from analytic feminist scholarship, intends to show how particular (often implicit) values commonly on display in analytic theology have simultaneously served both to marginalize certain voices from the realm of analytic theological debate and to reinforce a particular conception of the divine—one which, despite its historical roots, is by no means inevitable. I will claim that a particular conception (not unpopular in analytic circles) of what constitutes a "rational, objective, analytic thinker" often displays certain affinities with those infinite or maximal properties that analytic theologians have taken to be most relevant or essential to their theological conceptions of the divine, at least among those engaged in pursuing the project of setting out a so-called "perfect-being theology"⁴—and I will explore how thinking differently about the former could have a significant impact on how we think about the latter (and vice versa). Ultimately, I will argue that analytic theologians would do well to consider thinking of themselves less as "nowhere men" and more as "somewhere people," in ways that also make room in the discipline for the inclusion of traditionally neglected voices, as well as for constructive re-imaginings of God that can themselves inform reasonable analytic theological discourse.

¹ While some work has been done on liturgy and religious practice (cf., e.g., Cuneo 2016; Wolterstorff 2016, 2015), there does not as yet seem to be much by way of what has been traditionally called "practical" or "pastoral" theology in the analytic vein. On analytic theology as specifically systematic theology, cf. Crisp (2017).

² For further attempts at more closely defining and discussing what analytic theology is and does, cf., e.g., Wood (2021, 2016, 2014); Arcadi (2017); McCall (2015); Rea (2009); Abraham (2009).

³ On what definitions of analytic theology might gain by looking at the way analytic feminism has come to define itself, cf. Rutledge (2020).

⁴ Cf. Nagasawa (2017); Rogers (2000).

A few caveats are in order before I proceed. First, I will be focusing here largely on the work done in Christian analytic theology, as it is the tradition with which I am, for better and for worse, most familiar. However, I think some of what I say here may be applicable to other theological traditions whose intellectual representatives have historically appealed to a kind of perfect-being monotheism. This will include many strands of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim philosophical theology, but it may also apply to some interpretations of Mormonism, Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í Faith, and other religions less commonly treated in analytic theological modes. Second, I am assuming that both analytic theology and feminist philosophy are worthwhile scholarly undertakings. Those who wish to dismiss either from the outset are invited to better familiarize themselves with each of these approaches and then return to this paper with fresh eyes.

In this vein, we should recognize that although the bulk of the current literature has a distinctly confessional, Christian bent, analytic theology is not (and should not be) taken as relevant only for those who are “pro Christian,” “pro theism,” or even “pro religion.” Not only has there already been important work done in non-Christian analytic theology,⁵ analytic theology more generally can be extremely useful in the context of promoting understanding and increased interreligious dialogue.⁶ Further, insofar as it is concerned with elucidating and elaborating a significant form of existential meaning-making, it also has the potential to provide valuable insights for those who engage in other forms of meaning-making, including those who deny or doubt that some higher power or supernatural realm is real. In this sense, it could also contribute to religious-secular dialogue in the public sphere.⁷

Likewise, it is important to note that feminist philosophy and theology is not essentially “anti-man,” and neither do its discussions only concern women. To be sure, the feminist epistemology on which much of this paper concentrates focuses much attention on how gender categories, identifications, and attributions influence the way we think about knowledge, how we come to know things, who counts as an epistemic subject, and which values underlie our practices of inquiry and justification. But if anything, what makes it *feminist* is its larger social aims of *equality* and *empowerment*—especially with respect to access to epistemic resources and the ability to make authoritative claims to knowledge (including who can count as doing “real” philosophy or theology)—and these issues clearly go beyond mere discussions of gender or sex (E. Anderson 2020). As Ann Garry puts it: “Feminists seek philosophy that can generically be called ‘engaged,’ that is, philosophy that is potentially useful to empower human beings rather than contribute to the perpetuation of a status quo in which people are subordinated by gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation,

⁵ See, for example, Lebens (2020); Booth (2017); Altaie (2016). See also Volume 8 (2020) of this journal.

⁶ For more on how analytic theology and philosophy of religion can contribute to interreligious dialogue, cf. Griffioen (forthcoming) and Legenhausen (2013).

⁷ I take Anthony Pinn's (2015) secular humanist approach, as well as that of so-called “theological humanism” (cf., e.g., Boscailon 2013 and Klemm and Schweiker 2008), to represent examples of how engagement between theology and secularism can be creatively and productively accomplished. It would be nice to see more of this kind of work coming from an explicitly analytic theological standpoint.

and so on" (Garry 2018).⁸ Now certainly, the pursuit of this aim will likely involve *disrupting* and *complicating* ideas, intuitions, and background assumptions that many of us in philosophy and theology have simply taken for granted, and this might make some of us (especially insofar as we occupy positions of relative privilege) uncomfortable. But as we know, the role of philosopher-*qua*-gadfly has a long and respectable history, and, as I hope to show, feminist philosophical gadflies can bring productive irritations into the realm of analytic theology as well.

Finally, it is important to note that when I speak here of worries about the discipline of analytic theology, I am referring to *tendencies*, not to universally accepted practices or practices that are necessarily intrinsic (even if they may be endemic) to the discipline. For example, as Panchuk and Rea (2020) note, it is a misconception that analytic theology necessarily endorses epistemological, metaphysical, and/or theological realism, that it is restricted to the idealized and abstract as opposed to the historical and particular, and that it always objectifies in ways that presuppose a position of power among those who practice it.⁹ That being said, there is a certain predilection in the discipline toward all three of these practices, and the rhetorical demeanor of some of Christian analytic theology's louder and more visible practitioners might give one to think that they take these approaches, as well as those concerning objectivity that I spell out below, to be normative for the discipline.¹⁰ This essay is thus intended both as a corrective to those who might think that instances of analytic theology standing outside of these standard practices is not legitimate or sufficiently "rigorous" and as an encouragement to theological gadflies to continue subverting, queering, or even outright flouting some of these more cherished and deeply entrenched norms in the service of a more expansive, pluralistic, and welcoming theology in the analytic mode.

⁸ For this reason, the scholarly burden of articulating and developing a feminist analytic theology or philosophy of religion should not merely fall to *female* theologians and philosophers, and its primary task goes far beyond women's merely "free[ing] themselves from the ideas of their uninformed male mentors and intellectual overseers" so as "to develop their own authentic insights, discernments, and directions" (Meister 2014, 138). It is a task for *any* analytic theologian whose religious tradition concerns itself with the promotion of equality and justice for all persons. In this sense, I take it to be a task for *all* Christian analytic theologians, and very likely for analytic theologians of many other religious stripes as well.

⁹ Many of the essays in Panchuk and Rea's volume represent valiant counterexamples to these misconceptions and show some of the ways in which the kind of analytic theology I encourage below may be productively undertaken. Another promising collection of essays in this vein can be found in Hereth and Timpe (2019).

¹⁰ It is always difficult to tell whether the loudest voices or most visible figures in a discipline are really indicative of the bulk of the members of the discipline itself. But even if not, these persons often have the power to (either individually or collectively) set scholarly agendas, determine who gets hired, funded, or invited to speak, and perform other important gatekeeping functions.

2. “Nowhere Man”? Viewing the World from Nowhere (or Everywhere)

Whatever else analytic theology might be (e.g., from a substantive standpoint), it has strongly identified itself with the vocabulary, rhetoric, style, and methodological approach inherited from the analytic philosophical tradition, especially its emphasis on both argumentative “clarity” and logical “rigor.”¹¹ That is, the emphasis concerning what makes theology analytic is usually initially on the substantive *output* and rhetorical *style* of the theological reflections in question, and less on the *attitude, stance, or behavior* of those engaged in such theological reasoning. At the same time, the emphasis on “clarity” and “rigor,” as well as the general tone of much analytic theological discourse (especially online or in person, but also in print), suggest that, in order to achieve this kind of output, those persons engaged in analytic theology must, insofar as it is possible, adopt a particular sort of “rational attitude” toward the subject matter in question, even if they have a vested personal interest in its truth or falsity. Moreover, although rarely made explicit, one dominant idea of what it means to take up the “rational attitude” relevant to doing analytic theology is that it involves the adoption or approximation of a stance of *epistemic objectivity* on the part of the analytic theologian toward the objects of her theological investigation. Indeed, much of the way the discourse is conducted suggests that analytic theologians think of objectivity as a sort of “regulative ideal” that can and should guide our analytic theological endeavors, even (or perhaps especially) where one has “skin in the game.” In some contexts, it even appears as though it were the *sine qua non* of a subject’s being able to (non-accidentally or non-luckily) make “clear” and “rigorous” arguments of the kind that make for “good” analytic theology (or for *analytic* theology in the first place).

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, I will not challenge these basic assumptions here. In fact, for the purposes of this paper, I will assume with the majority of analytic theologians that producing clear, rigorous arguments proceeding from a rational, objective stance toward the subject matter, insofar as such a stance is psychologically possible and morally or theologically appropriate, is one generally laudable aim for the analytic theological enterprise. However, I will argue that there are legitimate concerns regarding *which values* are taken to constitute the purportedly “objective” stance in analytic theology, as well as *which arguers* are taken to actually display this kind of stance in their work, such that their arguments are considered sufficiently “clear” and “rigorous.” Further, while these concerns are also germane to areas of thought outside analytic theology, I will argue that they are especially pressing inside

¹¹ This is what Wood (2016) calls the “formal model” of analytic theology, as opposed to a “substantive model,” the latter of which not only “draws on the tools and methods of analytic philosophy” but does so “to advance a specific theological agenda, one that is, broadly speaking, associated with traditional Christian orthodoxy” (255). Ultimately, I think that most analytic theologians ultimately endorse something like this more substantive model, but I think they also generally assume that the formal, stylistic, or rhetorical aspects—together with a certain shared language, conceptual repertoire, and general attitude toward its subject matter—are nevertheless a significant part of what it is that makes their theology specifically *analytic*.

analytic theology where there is a further question of *which model of God* ends up correlated with the putatively objective stance, particularly when the values and standards associated with objectivity get maximized in the form of a perfect-being theology. Finally, I want to think about what might happen to these standard models of God when we begin to challenge the values often assumed in analytic circles to make up the objective stance? These are the questions and concerns that will occupy me in the rest of this paper.

I submit that one understanding of “objectivity” that implicitly permeates much Christian analytic discourse is that commonly referred to as the “view from nowhere” approach (hereafter ‘VFN’). Now to be sure, analytic theologians do not always come out and say that this is descriptively or normatively what they mean when they talk about a subject’s being appropriately “objective” with respect to some topic, or—as is more common in less formal contexts (e.g., online fora, conferences, op-eds, etc.)—when they insinuate that someone *lacks* the requisite objectivity regarding the subject matter. Furthermore, this approach to objectivity takes on various manifestations in the historical and contemporary philosophical and theological literature—usually without the more contemporary label ‘view from nowhere’ attached. However, I think that the ways many appeals to norms of clarity and rigorousness in analytic theology get employed (especially when couched in complaints that a member of the discourse is not abiding by them) do point to certain commonly embraced values concerning what it means to be objective, some of which are grounded in the history of the discipline.¹² It will thus be helpful to start by taking a closer look at some of the features of objectivity contained in what I am calling the ‘VFN’ model.

Since the VFN takes its label largely from Thomas Nagel’s 1986 book of the same name, this might be a good place to start. There, he writes:

Objectivity is a method of understanding. It is *beliefs* and *attitudes* that are objective in the primary sense. Only derivatively do we call objective the truths that can be arrived at in this way. To acquire a more objective understanding of some aspect of life or the world, we *step back* from our initial view of it and form a new conception which has that view and its relation to the world as its object. (Nagel 1986, 4; emphasis mine)

Bernard Williams describes a similar approach, which he calls the “absolute conception” of the world. As opposed to “the world as it seems peculiarly to us,” the absolute conception tries to represent “the world as it is *independent* of our experience”; it is “a conception of the world consisting of *nonperspectival* materials available to *any adequate investigator*, of whatever constitution” (Williams 1985, 154–55; emphasis mine). Already here, we see a common characteristic or norm

¹² Of course, if I am wrong about all or some of the values discussed below being commonly embraced by analytic theologians, then all the better for analytic theology. In this case, what I say here can both function as a further call to epistemic humility and serve as an impetus to think more critically about what we *do* mean by ‘objectivity’ or the ‘rational stance’, especially when it comes to making judgments about whose arguments are considered sufficiently “rigorous” or which approaches are appropriately “analytic.”

attributed to the VFN, namely that of taking up a *distanced, detached*, or otherwise *neutral* standpoint. In this sense, it is not really a “standpoint” at all but rather a *non-localized, aperspectival* conception of things from “nowhere in particular,” as Nagel puts it—or, if it *is* a standpoint, it is simply the most “generic” one. In fact, both Nagel and Williams claim that this approach makes a certain claim to universality for all “adequate” or “rational” inquirers. That is, the VFN model of objectivity maintains that, so long as one is rational, one should be able to take up such a stance (or at least aim at approximating it as an ideal), and when one does, one occupies the domain of *all* rational knowers, who are more less fungible.

Of course, Nagel himself was not uncritical of the VFN, and although Williams was optimistic about the usefulness of such a concept for science, he was much less so concerning its applicability in ethics. However, moral philosophers such as Roderick Firth and Charles Taliaferro have adopted what is widely known as the “Ideal Observer Theory” as a way to talk about the ideal objective stance in moral reasoning. With respect to the traits of the Ideal Observer, Firth writes that “he” is *all-knowing* and *all-seeing, disinterested, dispassionate, consistent*, and in all other respects *normal* (Firth 1952, 333–42). Given “his” purported omniscience and omnipresence, then, we might be inclined to understand the Ideal Observer Theory less as a “view from nowhere” and more as a “comprehensive view from everywhere,” as Taliaferro puts it (Taliaferro 2005, 79). However, to echo Pamela Sue Anderson’s critique of Taliaferro’s account, achieving a comprehensive view from everywhere is not only an impossible task for limited human subjects, even its approximation is rather likely to turn into an attempt to achieve the wholly impartial and neutral view from nowhere (P. S. Anderson 2005, 94). Indeed, insofar as Ideal Observer theories tend to emphasize *unity* and *consensus* as the only ideal outcomes (e.g., by trying to reduce the comprehensive perspectives to a single point of view, or to shed any unhelpful particularities that multiple viewpoints might fail to have in common), it is unclear whether the “Ideal Observer” isn’t really just equivalent to another kind of “Nowhere Man.” In what follows, then, I will stick to talking about the VFN, meaning it to be inclusive of Ideal Observer theories as well.

When we take these various views together, we arrive at a cumulative list of interconnected values and norms characteristic of the VFN model of epistemic objectivity, which we may summarize thusly:¹³

- i. **Subject/object dichotomy:** What is objectively known exists independently of its being known.

¹³ I have adapted this list from E. Anderson (2020), with some modifications and additions to Anderson’s original list. Although she depicts each of the items on her list as representing a distinct conception of objectivity, identifying only aperspectivity with the VFN, I think it is plausible to maintain that each of the items I have adapted or identified above represents one feature of the overall account best captured by the label ‘view from nowhere’—at least as it is typically manifested in analytic theology and philosophy of religion. I remain neutral on whether these individual values are individually necessary or jointly sufficient for one’s being said to take up or approximate the VFN. For our purposes here it will suffice to merely point out some of the characteristics that implicit or explicit proponents of the model tend to endorse.

- ii. **External guidance:** Objective knowledge consists of propositional attitudes whose content is determined by the way things really are, not by the knower herself.
- iii. **Detachment:** Objective knowers are affectively/conatively detached from the things known.
- iv. **Value-neutrality:** Objective knowers adopt an evaluatively neutral attitude toward what is known.
- v. **Aperspectivity, Ahistoricity:** Objectivity transcends particular spatio-temporal-historical locations or embodied standpoints.
- vi. **Generality, Abstraction:** Objectivity generalizes over contexts and prefers the universal or abstract to the particular or concrete.
- vii. **Simplicity, Unity:** Objective approaches will be as simple and unified as possible.
- viii. **Commonality:** Objectivity's output is accessible to all relevantly informed epistemic agents in full possession of their rational capacities, and such epistemic agents are fungible from the objective "stance."

Of course, these values tend to run together and are often difficult to distinguish from each other in practice, but there are some important relations between them that are worth noting. For example, [i] and [ii] express strongly realist intuitions concerning the objects of objective knowledge. Together with [iii], these conditions ensure that the mental attitude proper to objectivity is belief (or some other relevant cognitive attitude) which, if directed in the right way by the world, will amount to objective propositional knowledge. Put a bit differently, they can be understood as claiming a *mind-to-world direction of fit* with respect to the knower's attitudes and emphasizing the *independence* of the thing known from the knower. Values [iii]–[v], in turn, ensure that the stance is also an *impartial* or *neutral* one. The epistemic subject does not allow any affective feelings or background values to unduly influence their beliefs, and all individual perspective or historical positionality that could differentiate subjects is filtered out for the purpose of rational investigation. Of course, [v] is not unrelated to [vi], insofar as adopting an aperspectival, ahistorical stance involves abstracting away from any particular bodily locatedness in space or time, such that one is able to generalize over both bodies and contexts. Together with the attempt to reduce disparate phenomena as far as possible to simple and unified theories, as in [vii], and excluding as irrelevant those factors that might threaten the generality of the knowledge and/or the fungibility of epistemic subjects, as in [viii], these last four values attempt to ensure the putative *universal* or *all-encompassing* nature of the knowledge of objective "nowhere men."¹⁴

¹⁴ These values are on display to varying degrees in discussions in analytic philosophical theology concerning such topics as religious epistemology (in which the justification of metaphysically realist theistic belief plays a central role), religious experience (in which non-bodily, perennialist, universal, essentialist accounts tend to be preferred over somatic, constructivist, pluralistic, or culturally-embedded approaches, usually to justify metaphysically realist theistic belief), religious disagreement (in which the role of idealized, fungible, suitably neutral "epistemic peers" plays an almost ineliminable role), theodicy (in which participants in the discourse are asked to abstract away from emotional responses or personal experiences to think about how God and evil might "for all we

Taken as a whole, these values point to what it is to be an objective, rational knower on the VFN model—that is, to be someone worth acknowledging and engaging with in the collective pursuit of the kinds of truth and knowledge most worth acquiring in a domain (here: in analytic theology). Moreover, the commonality claim assumes that the deliverances of the VFN will, in principle, be accessible to most anyone who is, in fact, a rational inquirer in the relevant domain. This approach thus insinuates that anyone who does not take up the demanded stance, or who calls into questions the products of its deliberation, is effectively excluded from the realm of the rational concerning the subject matter at hand. That is, only those who can control their passions, detach from their interests and situated viewpoints, and see things “from the outside”—who have a perspicuous view of things as they are independent of their experience—are granted the epistemically virtuous status of someone in rational “control” of their beliefs in the respective domain. In this sense, the view from nowhere and the view from everywhere collapse into one another and set the normative parameters for epistemic agency in general: One who does not or cannot occupy this non-perspective with regard to the subject under discussion is viewed as not being in the business of acquiring objective knowledge about it in the first place. This is important because the denial of someone’s capacity as a rational knower may exclude them not only from epistemic but also from moral agency—or even degrade their very humanity—at least insofar as one’s capacity as a knower is a capacity essential to human agency and dignity, as Miranda Fricker (2007) suggests. If this is right, then being taken seriously as someone who can know things—and know them objectively—is no trivial matter, and to be excluded from them in an arena of discourse is more than a mere slight. I will return to this idea below, but first it will be helpful to turn to analytic theology itself and to have a closer look at the perfect-being theology that informs much of analytic theological and philosophy of religion discourse, so we can explore its affinities with the values expressed by the VFN model.

3. The “God Trick”¹⁵: Perfect Being Theology and Divine Eyes (*I*'s?)

Let us depart briefly from questions concerning the objective stance of *human* subjects to an exploration of how things stand with regard to *God* in analytic theology. As with its “partner in crime,” analytic philosophy of religion, much of the discipline’s focus has been on the metaphysics of so-called *perfect-being theism* (or ‘PBT’, as I’ll call it here) and constructing a perfect-being theology that would yield propositions the belief in which would be rational (or at least rationally permissible) for adequately-informed, “properly functioning” epistemic agents.¹⁶ Many analytic

know” be compatible with evil), and so on. How they are reflected in monotheistic perfect-being metaphysics is something we will explore presently.

¹⁵ The notion of the “god trick” is borrowed from Haraway (1988).

¹⁶ I will not go into the ableist implications of the role that “proper function” has come to play in contemporary analytic religious epistemology here, but I do think its use in these domains is not unproblematic.

theologians see themselves as inheriting the legacy of medieval scholasticism—and especially that of Anselm of Canterbury, who in the *Proslogion* famously addresses God as *aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit*. And although versions of PBT can be traced back to at least Plato, PBT reached a high point with thinkers like Ibn Sina, Moses ben Maimon, and Thomas Aquinas in the 10th-13th centuries (CE), who equated the God of the Qur'an, the Torah, or the Christian Bible with the greatest possible being and who, drawing from ideas in classical Greek philosophy, attempted to show how such a being was largely commensurable with the deliverances of the intellect. According to what, given its Greek philosophical roots, has traditionally been called “classical theism,” God’s attributes minimally include the following:

- a. **Aseity:** Not only is God distinct from God’s creation,¹⁷ God is also wholly self-sufficient and not dependent on anything else.
- b. **Actuality, Impassibility, Immutability:** God cannot lack anything, or be merely potential with regard to anything, since lacking “being” or “actuality” with regard to something is a deficiency. Therefore, God must be pure actuality—a being who does not passively undergo or “suffer” anything and who is thus also not subject to change.
- c. **Eternity, Immateriality, Incorporeality:** God is not located in time or space, which additionally entails that God cannot be material or embodied, since material bodies are spatio-temporal, can be changed and affected, and are limited and definite in ways a purportedly perfect being couldn’t be.

In other words, classical theism maintains that God, as a perfect being, must be a wholly simple and active, self-sufficient, unchangeable, disembodied, atemporal being. At the same time, many of the monotheistic thinkers in this tradition also wanted to hold onto the idea of a *personal* God who is capable of acting in some relevant sense. Hence, God must also have characteristics of *agents* like power, knowledge, goodness, and autonomy. However, in order to count as a *perfect* agent, God must possess these characteristics “to the max,” as it were. We can thus add the following attributes to the PBT list:

- d. **Omnipotence:** God is all-powerful, or maximally powerful; God can do anything it is (logically) possible to do.
- e. **Omniscience:** God is all-knowing, or maximally knowing; God knows everything there is to know.
- f. **Omnibenevolence:** God is wholly or maximally good; there is no evil (or lack of goodness) in God’s character or activity.
- g. **Sovereignty/Freedom:** God is fully in control of all God’s actions, and all things in creation are wholly under God’s control.

¹⁷ Some more Neoplatonist thinkers might deny or downplay the distinctness criterion, but this tends to invite a more pantheist or panentheist cosmology, which many proponents of classical theism (and of contemporary Christian analytic theology) are keen to reject. For several interesting essays on such alternative views of the divine, cf. Buckareff and Nagasawa (2016).

It doesn't take much effort to see the affinities between the divine attributes [a]–[g] as set out in traditional PBT, which characterize God's nature and relationship to creation, and the normative values [i]–[viii] as set out in the VFN model above, which characterize the nature of the rational, objective knower and their relationship to the thing known.¹⁸ For example, both [a]–[b] and [i]–[ii] ensure the independence of the agent or subject (God and the rational knower, respectively) from the object of their respective creative or epistemic activity. In PBT, this independence is reinforced by God's distinctness from everything else in material creation as an eternal, non-material, non-corporeal being [c], incapable of being passively changed or affected (or even, perhaps, of undergoing any sort of emotion) [b]. These attributes are reflected in the VFN-knower's aperspectivity and ahistoricity [v], emotional detachment [iii], and value neutrality [iv]. Moreover, God's maximal and all-encompassing knowledge, power, goodness, and sovereignty [e-g] not implausibly find their correlates in the VFN's emphasis on the general, the abstract, and the universal [vi-viii]. Put a bit more succinctly, PBT ensures God's full, self-sufficient independence and detachment as a non-corporeal, non-spatio-temporally-located being from everything else in material creation, which is buttressed by God's all-encompassing knowledge, power, goodness, and sovereignty over that creation. Correspondingly, the "objective" rational thinker on the VFN model is relevantly detached and unaffected, concerned with that which is independent, universal, and neither regionally nor historically located, who thereby represents a wholly rational, autonomous, epistemic agent in rational control of her beliefs.¹⁹

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the position occupied by the hypothetical "Ideal Observer" is often called the "God's-eye view." In fact, regardless of whether one thinks of the God of Western monotheism as an actually existing divinity who creates human beings *imago sui* or as a kind of Feuerbachian "projection" of human values, so long as one thinks that human rational capacities either mirror or are mirrored in the "twinkle" of the metaphorical Divine oculus, we are likely to see some identification between the epistemic values we champion and the purported nature of the divine on this front, such that those who are seen as better taking up the rational, objective stance are likewise likely to be seen as "closer to God" or more "God-like." This, as we will see, will be problematic for any analytic theology interested in defending PBT as it is traditionally construed. This is because the mutually reinforcing ideas of a certain conception of God (namely, that of PBT as characterized by [a]–[g] above) and a particular philosophical conception of what it

¹⁸ The affinities are especially strong if one equates God's creative activity with God's "causative knowledge" as many of the medieval authors cited above do.

¹⁹ I make no claims here about which of these conceptions (i.e., of rationality and objectivity, on the one hand, and of the God of perfect-being theism, on the other) is conceptually, causally, or historically prior. In actual practice (and in the history of theological thought), I suspect the two tend to rise and fall together. Still, it is interesting to note that, historically, as the central focal point moved away from God and toward the human subject during the Enlightenment, we come to find more explicit claims about what makes a rational knower—claims that, when idealized and maximized, very much mirror the properties formerly reserved for God. In any case, whatever the historical etiology of these affinities, there is no doubt that they are, at least psychologically, closely tied to one another in modern thought. It is for this reason that I think that changing our approach to one of these conceptions may have drastic implications for the way we think about the other, as I discuss below.

means to be “rational” (namely, the VFN as characterized by [i]-[viii] above) at once determine both *which conceptions of God are worth defending* and *who it is that can be in a position to rationally defend them*. And this very quickly starts to look question-begging when it comes to which views in analytic theology can count as “objective,” “clear,” or “rigorous” enough.²⁰ Those who endorse or embody epistemic standards that stand in tension with those promoted by the VFN are likely to be seen as having no business trying to develop a rationally defensible conception of God. Likewise, those whose preconceptions, experiences, or interpretations of God fall outside those generally put forward by traditional PBT are excluded from participation in rational theological inquiry from the outset, by virtue of not conforming to the traditional conception of what could constitute a “perfect being.”

However, before we turn to this issue, there is yet another characteristic commonly attributed to classical PBT that we have not yet mentioned—one which is perhaps even more troubling when we think about its correlate in the epistemological realm, namely the following:

h. **Simplicity/Unity:** A perfect being must be a wholly simple and unified being.

Given [h], God's personal attributes (together with all the others) must be in some way *identical* or *co-extensive*. Here we run into complicated medieval scholastic theological discussions that we need not rehearse again here. What is relevant for our purposes is the fact that the synthesis of classical theism and theistic personalism in PBT (which contemporary analytic theologians have spilled much ink defending) results in a view of God that *literally identifies power with knowledge, goodness, and agency*. The creative power of this disembodied, atemporal divine intellect simply consists in its eternally recognizing and knowing its own self, and this knowing potency is—by virtue of its being God—automatically and necessarily good, wholly free, and wholly in control. However, if (like the other the divine attributes) [h], too, finds a correlate in the VFN model, then it might appear that the domain of the powerful becomes the domain of the “rational” and “valuable,” such that members of the dominant class get to prescribe which kind of knowledge is worth having, who can be legitimately said to possess such epistemic goods, and why those knowers are more authoritative than their “less rational” counterparts. When the question turns back to concepts of God, then, it also means that the positions of the dominant group (those who speak the loudest and/or are the most visible in the discipline) will be given more credence and taken to be “better” theology than those from less mainstream groups, especially those who might dare to introduce any sort of “theo-divergent” view. The legitimation of such a view, even if only implicit, is both troubling and dangerous.

This is where feminist epistemology can help us both diagnose some problems in analytic theology's uncritical idealization of the VFN in its pursuit of PBT and

²⁰ Cf. Grace Jantzen (1999): “Whose values are reflected in the putative ‘view from nowhere’? The lame response that ‘this is just what the philosophy of religion consists of’ obviously begs the question of why, and in whose interests, that particular ‘consistency’ is held to and indeed zealously defended” (206). Cf. also Solberg (1997, 45).

propose some steps toward amelioration. Indeed, one of feminist epistemology's primary concerns has to do with diagnosing the role played by social and political power relations in a domain of discourse in establishing and regulating who is granted epistemic, moral, and agential standing within that domain. That is, feminist thinkers interrogate the ways power and privilege affect who is considered a competent knower with respect to an arena of discourse, as well as who is granted greater or lesser recognition, moral status, and agency within that arena.

Such interrogations are especially important in a domain like analytic theology where, as we have seen, conceptions of God and conceptions of rational knowers are closely intertwined with one another. I therefore want to spend the remainder of this paper exploring two issues concerning the connection between PBT and the VFN model in more detail and the ways in which feminist thought can help analytic theology better take these concerns seriously. First, even if we do accept at least some of the values expressed in the VFN model, there is a concern about which subjects have historically been thought to occupy or best approximate this "objective" stance, and which subjects have traditionally been excluded from this domain, especially if adopting such a stance is supposed to help analytic theology achieve epistemically valuable insights concerning the being "than which nothing greater can be conceived" as championed by analytic defenders of PBT. Second, there is the question of whether the values embraced by the VFN are the only epistemically valuable standards in the game—not only when it comes to the pursuit of ordinary or scientific knowledge but also with respect to theorizing about God and pursuing religious understanding in the analytic theological domain. What might centering other epistemic concerns and perspectives—even if only hypothetically or temporarily—mean for our conceptions both of who can be an authoritative knower and what makes a God?

4. Worry 1: Whose Domain?

First, let us for the time being accept the model of objectivity as embodied (or better, "disembodied") in the VFN model and tentatively agree that it represents at least one form of epistemically valuable objectivity. Before we just proceed with analytic theology "as usual," it is worth looking more closely at the ways in which power relations can affect who it is that can be considered a member of the class of objective knowers of this kind. That is, I want to explore briefly how the "god trick" that translates the singular "Divine Eye" into the class of individual "rational I's" (and vice versa) may end up excluding epistemic subjects who have potentially relevant testimony and perspectives to contribute to analytic theological discourse, but who—because of the way objectivity is policed by those in positions of power and visibility—find themselves standing outside the domain of what is considered "rigorous" or "properly analytic" theology.

Feminist scholars are often suspicious of the assertions made by those claiming to actually occupy the purportedly "objective" stance, insofar as it tends to be members of dominant and privileged groups who claim for themselves the ability to take up the VFN, not rarely at the cost of excluding members of marginalized or

oppressed groups, as well as the valuable testimony and particular ways of knowing they might accrue from their positionality. Put a bit differently, dominant perspectives can have a question-begging way of carving up both the world itself and the domain of epistemic expertise that, as Helen Longino puts it, “claims a particular structure for the world and then identifies a particular subjectivity as uniquely capable of knowing that structure” (Longino 1993, 110). Of course, this appropriation of the realm of the rational is not always intentional or explicit. In fact, although the policing of epistemic boundaries generally profits those in positions of power or those from socially privileged groups, it is often not something of which members of the dominant class are immediately cognizant. Given that theirs is simply *assumed* to be the “default” position, those in positions of privilege rarely find themselves needing to reflect on that privilege, nor do they need to consider other points of view or epistemic points of departure. As Grace Jantzen notes, “to the extent that power is firmly in place, the powerful do not even need to be aware of the fact that theirs is only one perspective [and] that things can be seen from a very different point of view” (Jantzen 1996, 99).

The luxury of being able to be ignorant of one's own positionality—of not needing to know about or adopt other perspectives to be taken seriously—can promote an epistemic insensitivity to perspectives outside one's own insular sphere and give rise to what José Medina calls the vice of *epistemic arrogance*. “Those who grow used to carrying with them the presumption [...] of speaking authoritatively, of not being cognitively suspect,” Medina writes, “have but rare opportunities to find out their own limitations,” and this can give rise to a kind of “cognitive self-indulgence” that can also lead to *epistemic laziness*, or a general contentedness with the *status quo*, as well as to a *close-mindedness* to alternatives (Medina 2013, 31–32). These epistemic vices are harmful both to those in subordinated social positions and to those in positions of privilege who assume their perspective to be the only relevant one in the game. Subordinated persons are harmed by being overlooked, discounted, or otherwise not being taken seriously as rational knowers, and members of the dominant group are harmed by being unable to perceive epistemically relevant possibilities and alternatives, thereby closing them off to testimony that could potentially transmit genuine knowledge or relevant understanding.²¹ Such arrogance can even become *pathological*, Medina thinks, “when the subject becomes absolutely incapable of acknowledging any mistake or limitation, indulging in a delusional *cognitive omnipotence* that prevents him from learning from others and improving. [...] Having an *undisputed cognitive authority* [and] thinking whatever one wants to think, without resistance [from outside], does not lead to the development of good epistemic habits” (Medina 2013, 32, emphasis mine). Despite how it might feel, enjoying epistemic authority without resistance is *not* the same as occupying (or even well approximating) the “God's-eye view.”

Indeed, when particular voices overwhelmingly dominate a discourse and claim objectivity for their perspective, the resulting lack of resistance can actually lead to *diminished* or *impoverished* views, as opposed to the complete and comprehensive knowledge they purport to aspire to. In disciplines like analytic

²¹ For more on how epistemic arrogance can cause moral and epistemic harm, cf. Tanesini (2016).

theology, such a lack of resistance can also cause debates and discussions to become stagnant and unable to move productively forward (or even sideways)—for example, when every newly published article on some topic represents just one more inconsequential move in what appears to be a never-ending game with no clear goal in sight.²² This can result in what Basil Mitchell called “minute philosophy,” or a preference for focusing only on those limited metaphysical and epistemological topics that can be treated with purportedly “exemplary clarity and rigour.” It “put[s] a premium on tight manageable themes” in which “the prevailing orthodoxy [is] reinforced by gestures, tones of voice and figures of speech” which often serve to police the boundaries of acceptable theological or philosophical discourse (Mitchell 2005, 22).

However, this is not the only—or perhaps even the most distressing—aspect of the dominant discourse in analytic theology. When we look at the discourse surrounding PBT, another worry arises. We have seen the identification of the ideals of objective rationality with the attributes of the God of classical theism. And we have also noted that the God of classical theism—at least in much Christian analytic theology—is generally also taken to be a person. Yet this God is not characterized in the Christian philosophical tradition as just any person, but rather as a specifically *masculine* person: God, too, as it turns out, is a “Nowhere *Man*.” The detached, incorporeal, atemporal, wholly active Divine Intellect is simultaneously identified as the strict God-*Father* of Scripture, the *King* of Creation, the *Lord* of the Universe. Framed a bit differently, the God in whom knowledge, power, and goodness is claimed to coincide is still overwhelmingly portrayed by analytic theology as male. Indeed, it is remarkable how much masculine language and imagery still dominates analytic theology. It is so pervasive that even many of those scholars who put forward non-personalist or pan(en)theist views of God still continue to employ pronouns like “he” and “his” instead of “it” or just “God.”

Now one might claim that this is merely an oversight, an unreflected vestige of antiquated metaphors and the Western social imaginary. Philosophers and theologians who use this language are merely speaking “loosely” or “metaphorically,” but they “don’t really mean it.” This is no doubt part of the truth. We need only look at the history of Western European art to see how whiteness and maleness dominate and inform popular conceptions of the divine to the point that anything else is almost unimaginable, even for those like myself who do their best to think about God differently. Yet the masculinist symbolic of analytic theology points to a more general problem of those who claim the God’s-eye view or its best approximation for themselves. Not only is the history of Western philosophy and theology itself strongly informed by this religious symbolic, the default epistemic subject has traditionally been taken to be the male reasoner, and the ideals of rational autonomy so central to Enlightenment accounts of the self have, as Sally Haslanger has noted, generally been defined in contrast to those features and capacities taken (even if erroneously) to be characteristic of women—for example, that women are guided by emotion over

²² This is not to say that philosophy should never be playful—quite the contrary! But when its more onanistic and self-congratulatory aspects are mistaken for its most earnest and “rigorous” attempts at VFN-style objectivity, we might suspect that something is amiss.

reason, are more intuitive and less discursive, less capable of value-neutral or abstract formal thought, and so on (Haslanger 2012, 47). And even though many of us in analytic theology may think of ourselves as knowing better, sometimes our collective biases are so deeply embedded in our largely unreflective social imaginings that they can act on us, even when we both believe such biases are bad and are committed to not judging or behaving in biased ways (Fricker 2007).

This is what gives the feminist reason to be doubly suspicious of the male-dominated scholarship on PBT in analytic theology and the insistence that it is this scholarship that “coincidentally” best occupies the objective standpoint. Not only is there little explicit epistemic resistance to the dominant PBT view (including with respect to God’s maleness), the implication that this is just what analytic theology consists of may merely serve, to quote Jantzen, as a “camouflage for (conscious or unconscious) perpetuation of sexism and other forms of injustice” in terms of who is considered as doing “analytically rigorous” work (Jantzen 1996, 92). Here we might hearken back to Roderick Firth’s claim about the Ideal Observer (always, incidentally, characterized as a “he”) as being someone who is in all relative respects “normal.” When we find ourselves in social contexts in which the default perspective represented or the voice that speaks the loudest is the male one, what is “normal” very quickly becomes identified with the masculine, and analytic theology is not immune to this threat. If anything, given its idolization of the VFN-esque “God’s-eye view,” it is doubly plagued by this problem.

This takes me to my next point, which I think even those who may be uncomfortable with terms like “masculinist symbolic” and “social imaginary” can get behind—namely the question of whether the values expressed in the “ideal perspective” of the VFN that goes hand-in-hand with dominant conceptions of the divine in PBT are the only reasonable values that can be adopted in our rational pursuits, including in analytic theology. Might not the VFN itself only provide a partial perspective on reality? And is it really the best way to think about rational objectivity? It is to these questions I now turn.

5. Worry 2: Which Values?

First, it is important to note the distinction between a) the claim that those dominant voices who assume their view appropriately approximates the VFN fail in epistemically relevant ways to meet their own standards, and b) the claim that the standards they espouse are perhaps not always those that are the most epistemically (and morally) virtuous for our concerns as rational subjects. The former claims that many of the dominant voices and views in analytic theology are really not as impartial, disinterested, neutral, and universal as they take themselves to be. The latter, however, calls into question the very standards of objectivity they (perhaps erroneously) claim to exemplify. These criticisms are by no means mutually exclusive, but I think the latter claim also demonstrates potential for the development of a positive—and not a merely critical—feminist analytic theology going forward.

If we turn our attention to this latter line of inquiry, the question becomes: Why assume that the criteria we set out as constitutive of the VFN are the best or only criteria for objectivity, especially when it comes to thinking about models of the divine? Before we begin, however, it is important to note that calling the VFN approach into question is *not* the same as rejecting the importance of reason and rationality altogether. It is merely to note that, since these values themselves do not arise from a perspectiveless “nowhere,” they can perhaps be extended, supplemented, complemented, or corrected—especially if should it turn out that they tend to exclude perspectives and interests that are of epistemic and moral relevance to projects we care about. As Jantzen half-jokingly remarks, “Critical reason need not be replaced by a sardine can opener, but it could very beneficially be supplemented by [...] a wider understanding of reason that includes sensitivity and attentiveness, well-trained intuition and discernment, creative imagination, and lateral as well as linear thinking” (Jantzen 1999: 69).

Indeed, some of the most championed values of the VFN have already been called into question in other areas of philosophical inquiry. For example, thinkers like Iris Marion Young (2011), Jonathan Dancy (2004), and Bernard Williams (1981) have challenged the norms of universality and neutrality in the realms of moral and political reasoning, arguing that particularity and partiality are both inescapable and, in some cases, even desirable. Others like Amia Srinivasan (2018) and Macalester Bell (2013) have argued that attitudes like anger and contempt can be morally apt and even epistemically beneficial (especially when it comes to countering epistemic vice), such that detachment from passion need not be antithetical to participation in objective, rational discourse and may even be productive in driving such discourse. Likewise, the idea that the values of complexity or multiplicity may sometimes be preferable to simplicity and singularity seems quite plausible (e.g., in the aesthetic domains of art or music, perhaps also in some areas of mathematics). But even in physics and cosmology, it is not clear that the explanation with the most parsimonious ontology is always the preferable one. Take, for example, the medieval theory of the “principle of plenitude” and its contemporary inheritance in the work of some modern-day physicists (e.g., Jaeger 2016; Kane 1976), or maybe even in David Lewis’s (1973) rejection of Ockham’s razor as requiring quantitative parsimony.

Perhaps even more importantly, José Medina (2013) and Helen Longino (1993) have suggested that diversity and disagreement might be more relevant for epistemic objectivity than commonality and consensus. Medina’s so-called “polyphonic contextualism,” for example, endorses the introduction of what he calls “epistemic frictions” or “resistant imaginings” into dominant discourses. The idea is that introducing disruptive or dissonant perspectives and models, especially those arising from the double-consciousness of marginalized perspectives, can lead to a kind of virtuous “multi-perspectivity” which drives discussion forward instead of reinforcing the *status quo*. Longino, for her part, puts forward a view of scientific knowledge as “an outcome of the critical dialogue in which individuals and groups holding different points of view engage with each other” (Longino 1993, 112). Such a dialogue is constructed “not by individuals but by an interactive dialogic community” and is considered “productive of knowledge to the extent that it facilitates transformative criticism” (112). In this sense, critical dialogue must involve more

than just various philosophers from a particular in-group raising objections to one another within an insulated and homogenous sphere of dialogue. It must make room for *differently-situated* perspectives and be open to criticism that could genuinely *transform* the nature of the dialogue itself.²³

Moreover, for both Medina and Longino, diversity in public and scientific dialogue does not necessarily seek to arrive at a singular, unified point of consensus, as the VFN would appear to promote. Their multi-perspectivalism does not aim at a reduction or amalgamation of all views into a single comprehensive “God’s-eye” view. It refuses, as Longino puts it, “to narrow reasonable belief to a single one among all contenders, in part because it does not constrain belief in a wholly unmediated way” (113). At the same time, both philosophers reject a straightforward relativism and recognize constraints on what can count as reasonable approaches to a subject. One way of thinking about this is by exploring what Miranda Fricker (2000) calls “perspectival realism,” an approach which recognizes that there are many perspectives on a shared world and that multiple perspectives can be rational or authoritative, even if not strictly commensurable with one another. This exploration, Fricker maintains, will involve an extended *ethical* discussion about epistemic practice to determine which uses of reason are merely authoritarian, as opposed to authoritative—and this, in turn, will involve asking important questions about how power relations influence the epistemic domain. Still, such an endeavor need not commit us to a metaphysical or ontological pluralism, merely a first-order epistemic pluralism—one that might have direct consequences for the way the discourse on topics like religious disagreement are conducted in analytic theology and philosophy of religion.²⁴

In another vein, we might look to contemporary epistemologists like Catherine Elgin (2017) who want to upset the “tyranny of truth” and realism in the assumed VFN and shift our focus from piecemeal knowledge on the model of justified or warranted true belief to that of the more holistic enterprise of *understanding* (construed as accepting a system of commitments in reflective equilibrium in a particular context for a particular purpose). When understanding becomes the center of our epistemic focus, we may even care somewhat less about a characterization of the mind-to-world direction of fit that takes truth-as-correspondence to be its sole aim and think more about what certain perspectives and models allow us to *do* theologically and what features of reality may be variously *exemplified* in the different models constructed from our various positions and locations in the world.²⁵

Finally, we may start to think more about the role of emotion and desire, the body and embodiment, story and history in our epistemic practices, especially our religious ones. Whether or not God is immaterial, noncorporeal, or atemporal, *we* are embodied creatures, and we come to know and understand God (as well as our fellow human beings) via *embodied* engagement with both the Word and the world. To

²³ The importance of the possibility of genuine, positive transformation should not be overlooked here. Mere contrarianism or online “trolling” in bad faith is not what Medina and Longino have in mind, nor should it be encouraged in such arenas of discourse.

²⁴ On this point, cf. Legenhausen (2013).

²⁵ For more on the promise of this kind of approach in philosophy of religion, cf. Griffioen (forthcoming).

ignore the ways in which narratives and histories, space and place, smells and bells, and the whole gamut of ordinary sensual religious experience shape our ways of knowing—and our ways of conceptualizing the divine—is to do a great disservice to the kinds of beings that we are.

6. Transformation and Sacrifice

So what does all this mean for analytic theology? Ultimately, it is my hope that thinking more about feminist critiques of the kinds discussed here can assist us in helping to spur its transformation, both critically and positively. Minimally, we can both reflect on the various kinds of privilege present in the discipline (not only with respect to gender but also with respect to race, ability, class, sexual orientation, country of origin, religious background, and the like) and how our assumptions about who is more or less “objective” or “rational” or “rigorous” may be informed by the ways we inhabit or fail to perceive that privilege. Moreover, we can consider how dominant conceptions of and discourses concerning the divine—especially with regard to PBT—might serve to reinforce that privilege at the expense of other voices and perspectives.

In this vein, we can also consider that those on the margins of analytic theology might actually have a *more perspicuous view* of things as they stand in the discipline than those who occupy the dominant perspective, as they must often be able not only to represent their own situated perspective but also that of the dominant group. In many cases, their very acceptance and survival in the discipline depends on their being able to “talk the talk and walk the walk”—to be able to see things from the view of those who assume their own position is the default one.²⁶ If this is right, then analytic theology would do well to extend Richard Swinburne’s (2004) widely cited principles of credulity and testimony to the experiences of those marginalized voices in the discipline and to take their criticisms seriously. It may also involve lending more credibility to the testimony of laypersons who are socially or religiously marginalized, or who are victims of spiritual trauma and other horrendous evils, as well as to think about what perlocutionary effects certain discussions in analytic theology might have on members of these groups.²⁷

Analytic theology can additionally attempt to more actively incorporate alternative perspectives and epistemic resistance into its discussions and to search for ways in which “theo-divergent” views may actually deepen rather than threaten our conceptions of what a perfect being might look like. For example, Helen De Cruz

²⁶ Cf., for example, W.E.B. DuBois’s discussion of “double consciousness” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; in Du Bois 1986), as well as Medina’s (2013) development of these ideas in his promotion of the idea of a *kaleidoscopic social imagination*.

²⁷ Cf. Marilyn McCord Adams concerning what William Rowe called “restricted standard theism”: “[O]ur philosophical propensity for generic solutions—our search for a single explanation that would cover all evils at once—has permitted us to ignore the worst evils in particular [...] and so to avoid confronting the problems they pose” (Adams 2000, 3). For a discussion of the effects of spiritual trauma, cf. Panchuk (2018). For a discussion of the potentially harmful effects of theodicy discourses on those who have suffered horrendous evils, cf. Griffioen (2018).

has recently argued that analytic philosophy of religion and theology could be greatly enriched by the introduction of epistemic frictions—both in terms of engaging more sincerely and contextually with historically marginalized thinkers and in terms of actively including and engaging living philosophers from various traditions and demographic backgrounds. As philosophers and theologians, she argues, “we shape the field and prioritize certain phenomena in our experience as worthy of philosophical attention, and even what kinds of engagements count as philosophical [or theological or analytic]” (De Cruz 2020, 42). Given this, we may even have an epistemic obligation in analytic theology to not just *tolerate* but also to find ways to *introduce* frictions into our discussions.

Of course, this need not involve inventing wholly new ways of thinking. Indeed, several of the worries I have raised in this paper are nothing new in feminist philosophy of religion, even if the contemporary context calls for somewhat different framings and foci. The fact that work by feminist philosophers of religion and theologians has not yet received the attention or uptake it deserves in analytic theology is one of the reasons that some contemporary feminist theologians remain somewhat suspicious of the discipline, but it also points to a wealth of literature to which it might be worth returning and re-exploring from our current situation.²⁸ Moreover, even within analytic theology's self-styled inheritance of the legacy of medieval thought, recovering the ideas of such medieval women thinkers as Mechthild of Magdeburg, Gertrude the Great, Marguerite Porete, Elsbeth Stagel, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and others can allow analytic theology to find new continuities with medieval philosophy and theology by creating room for “disruptive” voices from outside the scholastic male canon.²⁹

Ultimately, if we open ourselves up to “disrupting” the traditional values championed by the VFN—and if we make an effort to incorporate and sometimes even *center* the perspectives of traditionally marginalized and subordinated voices³⁰—then even if we still hold to a view of God as a perfect being (and of ourselves as somehow reflecting God's nature) our view of that divinity (and our humanity) might start to look very different. For example, if our conceptions of God involve some degree of projection or analogizing from the human situation, then changing how we think about the ideals of human reasoning might significantly alter the way we think about God. Similarly, if we hold that God exists and human beings are made *imago dei*, then changing the way we think about God might change the way we think about rationality, epistemic virtue, and human modes of knowledge and understanding. Neither of these approaches rules the other out, and engaging in explorations in both directions can be fruitful for analytic theology.

Thus, as we go about evaluating our models of God, we need to consider more than their mere ability to solve the abstract puzzles that arise within the context of classical theism. We also need to reflect on the *real effects such models have for real*

²⁸ In this sense, I resist Chad Meister's (2014) claim that “feminist philosophy of religion is in its infancy” (138). It may even pre-date analytic theology, depending on how one understands the latter.

²⁹ Cf., for example, Van Dyke (forthcoming, 2018, 2016); Holmes (2013); Coakley (2009). See also my blog entry about Mechthild for the St. Andrews “Logia” series here: <http://tinyurl.com/50shadesofmechthild>.

³⁰ Cf. Naomi Scheman's (2011) notion of “queering the center by centering the queer.”

human beings. Certainly the question of truth should not become irrelevant in these discussions, but I agree with Jantzen that even *if* theological realism is the preferable approach, there can hardly be doubt that the traditional God of PBT has been used—and still is used—in ways oppressive of women and minorities. Thus, she writes, “the ‘truth’ question asked too insistently and too soon is part of the problem, not part of the solution” (Jantzen 1996, 110). For Jantzen, the important question is not as much about truth as it is about *adequacy*: “Are the [divine] characteristics thus projected really the ones that will best facilitate human becoming? Do they constitute a worthy divine horizon?” I would add here the question: Do they promote a better understanding of the experience of our fellow human beings, or do they distort our beliefs about them in ways that can do both them and ourselves real epistemic and/or moral harm? If the latter, then perhaps we need to think about giving up some of our cherished images, as they may have turned into idols without us noticing. Indeed, as religion often reminds us, genuine transformation often requires sacrifice. It is thus perhaps time to sacrifice the God of the “Nowhere Man” for a God—or perhaps even *gods*—of *Somewhere People*.³¹

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³¹ I am grateful for the comments and questions from participants at the *Religion als Perfektion* conference in Berlin, as well as those raised in the Philosophy Department Colloquium at the University of Konstanz, where earlier versions of this paper were first presented. I would also like to thank three anonymous reviewers and the editors of *JAT* for their helpful comments on the paper. Finally, many thanks to Daniel Schumacher for reminding this heavily pregnant author to take the requisite naps and snack breaks while she worked at getting this paper into its final form.

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