

**William Wood. *Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion*. Oxford Studies in Analytic theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. vi+329 pp. \$100 (hbk).**

David Decosimo  
Boston University

The task William Wood sets for himself in *Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion* is demanding and ambitious. Wood seeks to defend the rightful place of analytic theology (“AT”) and theology generally within the secular university, especially against the objections of anti-theological religious studies scholars. But the title tells less than half of the story, for he also, and at greater length, aims to vindicate AT as properly Christian and truly theological over and against theologians who claim it is neither, some of whom regard it “an especially pernicious...form of philosophy” (4). These two aims are not only equally central to the book, but unfold amidst an admirable and skillful overarching attempt to facilitate dialogue and build bridges between these diverse fields. The book, then, is simultaneously a two-front apologia and a welcome attempt to spark a mutually enriching and much needed conversation. Thus, in addition to apologist, Wood positions himself and ably serves as a kind of translator, one whose native tongue is AT and who primarily speaks to non-analytic theologians and religion scholars, while occasionally helping fellow analytic theologians or philosophers of religion to better understand their critics. Wood rightly notes the difficulty of holding his dual audiences and distinct apologetic projects together: persuading theologians of AT’s acceptability requires demonstrating its maximally Christian theological character, but just *that* seems likely to further alienate already skeptical religion scholars. Conversely, showing AT to be an acceptable and legitimate form of inquiry vis-à-vis “secular” standards threatens to harden AT’s theological critics in their view that it is insufficiently theological and deploys a methodology that diminishes God’s transcendence, rendering God just another (albeit larger) object among objects.

In its parts and in the particulars of its various arguments, Wood’s book is largely successful and brimming with insightful points, creative arguments, and helpful distinctions. Few could have written this book at all, let alone so well. As a whole and as a rhetorical and strategic matter, however, the decision to pursue these distinct, arguably competing, aims in a single book – and with the particular structure Wood deploys – risks undermining its efforts, especially in relation to religion scholars. For, aside from a very short (seven page) chapter and some introductory points early on, the entire first two-thirds of the book are almost exclusively devoted to defending AT against Christian theological critics. It is a rare religion scholar – and an even rarer *anti-theological* religion scholar – who will persevere through two-hundred pages of decidedly intra-Christian theological debate to arrive finally at the book’s case for theology in the secular academy, the “Part IV” which aptly shares the book’s title.

This is a shame, for these closing four chapters, which build on some of Wood’s earlier articles and defend theology’s place in the secular university, stand alongside Paul MacDonald, Jr.’s 2017 *Christian Theology and the Secular University* (which, oddly, Wood neither cites nor engages) as one of the best treatments and defenses we have of the complete propriety of

theology within the secular university. Were reason and principle really the primary issue, the two books together ought to put to rest what were never particularly good objections in the first place. Beyond their apologetic work, Wood's chapters in this part of the book are also full of insight about the appropriate nature and shape of scholarly inquiry related to religion and theology more generally. This includes: a persuasive account, informed by Robert Brandom's and Jeffrey Stout's inferentialist visions of commitments, entitlements, and challenges of norms of good scholarly inquiry and interchange and a demonstration that AT clearly satisfies them; a sketch of varieties of methodological naturalism and their distinction from various forms of reductionist and ontological naturalism; a convincing explanation of why there is no *per se* conflict between AT and a duly metaphysically constrained methodological naturalism; a quick but devastating critique of metaphysically-freighted "ontological naturalism on the cheap"; a needed reminder that save for a number of American cases, religion scholars and theologians around the world often work happily alongside one another in shared departments, without theology taking over the university or destroying the study of religion; and, finally, an effective critique of the regnant, increasingly pervasive practice of and commitment to "hegemonic critique" within religious studies (one that, I have argued elsewhere, rarely takes due responsibility or offers argument for its animating commitments) out of which Wood nonetheless wrings insights for the improvement of AT.

One of Wood's basic but important points across this closing section is that serious – as opposed to merely ideologically expressivist – critique, critique that pursues entitlement to its commitments and attempts to be *honest* as authentic genealogy purports to be, must be no less open to *positive* evaluative assessment and conclusion than to negative one. Such critique must be open to the possibility of discovering that practice X, reason Y, or belief Z is good, true, beautiful, or at least superior to the alternatives. Moreover, if there is to be room for primarily negative normative critique in religious studies and the university, as there so obviously is, there is no principled reason whatsoever to exclude serious, disciplined, intellectually demanding, positive, appreciative, and constructive normative engagement. Building on this insight, the book's penultimate chapter culminates in Wood's constructive vision for AT as "rigorous appreciation": a species of normative inquiry that, while absorbing some of the spirit of unmasking and non-totalizing, non-self-consuming genealogical suspicion, embodies the riches of humanistic commitment to wonder, attachment, flourishing, and thoughtful preservation and cultivation of one of humanity's great cultural inheritances through "normative evaluation of Christian truth claims and practices" (278). As Wood puts it, "the most important Christian doctrines seem at least as plausible as some controversial 'secular' philosophical [and, I would add, humanities and social-scientific] positions that are not regarded as academically beyond the pale" (217). Both in the interest of space and in view of this journal's readership, I focus for the remainder of this review primarily on Wood's defense of AT as theology, which constitutes some two-thirds of the book.

The book's three-chapter introduction sketches Wood's agenda and identifies its basic challenges and strategy. Against theological critics, it will argue that AT is sufficiently historically sensitive, distinctively Christian (rather than generically theist), sensitive to God's transcendence, and no less spiritually edifying than other forms of theology – even as it often seeks to answer quiet different questions than much contemporary theology. Against religious studies critics, his strategy, as I've explained, is to contend that there is no salient difference between the kind of inquiry, methodology, and scholarly norms constitutive of and operative in philosophy and in AT. If there is room for philosophy in the university, there is room for AT.

From there, the book offers a primer on what AT is first by explaining its relation to contemporary philosophy, and what contemporary philosophical work is even like, and then by offering snapshots of exemplary AT meant to demonstrate its continuity with ‘constructive’ theology, past and present. Here, Wood quite effectively displays the character and breadth of AT and its identity, in many cases, as a form of faith seeking understanding.

The longest and to my mind most important section of the book is directly devoted to addressing AT’s theological critics, many of whom are phenomenologists like Jean-Luc Marion or John Caputo or figures as diverse as David Hart, Brian Davies, and Catherine Pickstock who worry that AT denies God’s transcendence. Of course, many of the theological arguments against AT can seem, at first blush, very weak or more like mere accusations. That doesn’t deter Wood from treating them seriously and, at each point, trying to discern and reconstruct what we might call the objection behind the objection. His work here will be particularly helpful for those less familiar with contemporary theology who might be inclined to ignore, dismiss, or misunderstand such concerns. This charitable impulse is an animating and powerful feature of the book and fittingly enacts its overarching goal of breaking down various dividing walls of hostility.

Wood begins his efforts with a very brief Trinitarian theology of creation and even briefer account of the fall intended show how analytic commitments to reason, reasoning, truth-seeking, and ongoing argumentative exchange arise from explicitly Christian theological commitments. Given creation and fall, analytic theology answers to both the human capacity and need to seek and speak truth about God, which, of course, requires distinguishing truth from error (82; 97). The account is admirably enriched and nuanced by historical and contemporary sources. For instance, to address worries that an exclusively reason- and will-centric account of *imago dei* degrades the dignity of the intellectually disabled, Wood deploys Kathryn Tanner’s Christological account of *imago dei*, on which our resemblance to the human Jesus grounds the doctrine (88).

Things do move quickly here, so much so that at points some significant claims outrun the argumentation and elaboration they require: that God created humanity for the sake of Incarnation (89); that “Christ is no philosopher” (e.g. given Christ’s complete infused knowledge, Thomas Aquinas would disagree); that the fall necessarily affects theological, moral, and ethical inquiry more than other sorts of inquiry, like science (95-6, why not see the noetic effect of sin in modal and dispositional terms rather than varying in terms of a particular subject matter?); that the Father eternally gives the divine *substance* to the Son and Spirit (85).

Wood claims his theological account of creation grounds and entails “weak realism”: “that things in the world really exist” and that humans are capable of “knowing things in the world as they really are” (93). But without more argument and explanation it is not clear how creation and even the possibility of knowledge about God through creation *requires* weak realism (let alone while also ruling out, as he insists, “strong realism”). Notwithstanding some qualifications, Wood’s claims seem to entail that his sketched doctrine of creation somehow precludes idealism of any sort (93). But why think that? Does a broadly Christian doctrine of creation rule out Edwards- or Berkely-inspired idealism? If so, why? For instance, couldn’t one hold that God creates, as Wood argues, *and* that we can have true knowledge of God, even with creation playing *some* causal role in this, but it still be the case that much or all of creation or creation as it “really is” remains perpetually unknown to us?

Nor is it quite clear what the adverb “really” is doing in Wood’s vision here. This is particularly the case given Wood’s later, explicit rejection of, e.g., Jeffrey Stout’s and Robert Brandom’s accounts of truth and knowledge, on which there are facts about the world and on which we can get the world wrong in our beliefs and claims, but on which it is unhelpful at

best and misleading at worst to distinguish between knowing or referring to “things in the world” and “things in the world as they really are” (198). It is not clear to me what this “really” means or how the sketched doctrine of creation sustains or requires it, not least because Wood rejects as overly “strong” realism the idea that we could know the world “perfectly” or “completely.” But what’s the difference between *that* and knowing the world as it “really” is – as opposed to simply *knowing* it (93)?

Regardless, neither of his “weak realist” claims about things in the world “really” existing or humans knowing those things as they “really” are seem strictly necessary to affirm or justify Wood’s later and more obviously required point that humans can make true theological statements (97-98). As he eloquently puts it, “We can reason discursively about God, because God has revealed himself to us...accomodat[ing] himself to our cognitive limitation... This is a supremely gracious act of divine condescension” (107). And AT, he concludes, is one tool for doing this.

The book’s third part spans three of its longest chapters and represents Wood’s primary response to AT’s theological critics. It is persuasive, thoughtful, and illuminating. The central theological critique Wood addresses is one or another variation on the charge that AT is “idolatrous,” that it treats God as a “thing in the world.” First, he must make sense of the critique: Given that idolatry is about wrong *worship*, why think thoughtfully and sincerely formulated, recognizably Scripture-, reason-, and tradition-informed Christian claims about God that are allegedly erroneous constitute *idolatry* rather than just *error*? After all, if getting God perfectly right were a necessary condition for avoiding idolatry, who could stand before him?

Wood contends that critics are really charging AT with (a) minimizing God’s transcendence by failing fully to honor the creator/creation distinction and (b) failing to relate to, theologize, and speak about God with due reverence. And he sets about patiently contending that, whatever the case may be with this or that particular theologian, there is no evidence to suggest these critiques hold against AT per se. Provided AT or any Christian theology satisfies the criteria of what he calls (Uniqueness), (Ultimacy), and (Worship) – which speak respectively to God’s ontological uniqueness and the denial that creatures share his mode of existence or being; to everything’s utter dependence in every respect on God and God’s non-dependence on anything; and to the demand to “think only about God with an attitude of worship” and to worship God alone – that suffices to avoid the critic’s charges (125). Point by point and criticism by criticism, Wood ably shows that AT need not violate these criteria.

At the same time, (Worship) – “When thinking about God, think only with an attitude of worship, i.e. with adoration, reverence, awe, love, obedience, humility, and gratitude” – which he says is *required* to avoid idolatry, seems to rule out much that contemporary theologians and, arguably, Scripture itself, affirms as important and even necessary for right relation to God: frustration, disappointment, bewilderment, and anger toward God, for example (137). Whether in doing theology or living as a Christian, these do not seem always wrong or contrary to the reverence God is due. And even if they are sometimes, often, or always wrong, their wrongness seems a matter of something other than “idolatry,” rejection of God’s transcendence, or failure to worship. Now, Wood could easily adjust his formulation of (Worship), but the point is worth noting because it is connected to a more significant issue.

Alongside a few remarks devoted to what AT might helpfully learn from critical theory (259-63), a brief section on the relation between AT and liberation theology consisting in discussion of a chapter on the topic by Sameer Yadav (72-76) constitutes the book’s sole direct engagement with issues of social justice or contextual or liberation theology. To be maximally

clear, I do not see this as any sort of per se problem or deficiency, as though there is a universal duty to engage or prioritize such issues in doing theology or to do theology in the manner preferred by contextualists or liberationists, or as though theologians have some duty to excuse, apologize for, or justify their not doing this. But I do believe I am increasingly in the minority in holding these views. And, precisely given that reality, I fear that, *given the book's central aim of vindicating AT to theologians broadly and winning a hearing for this way of doing theology*, this represents an important missed opportunity. There is a much more pervasive, totalizing, virulent, and influential family of critique which the book almost completely neglects. Indeed, that family of critique targets the critics whom Wood ably answers as much as it targets AT itself, even if it would regard AT as perhaps the most vicious type of this “problematic” sort of theology.

At least in the U.S., substantial swaths of academic theology are centrally or exclusively devoted to social justice, critique, and to practicing some form of contextual, liberation, or identity-based Christian theology. Some of these theologians and students regard forms of theology like AT as irrelevant and decadent at best, and racist, colonialist, oppressive, and ‘violent’ at worst, a verdict that extends as much to figures like Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Kant, and Tillich and to questions of the sort that preoccupy AT, as to styles of doing theology that prize the intellectual goods that AT seeks to realize. To the extent they have even heard of AT or have a sense of what it is, for those animated by Audre Lorde’s mantra “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” perhaps no form of contemporary theology counts as more in need of dismantling. For, arguably, AT represents the pinnacle of “centering” ways of doing theology that are (allegedly) “white,” “western,” and “male.” Whatever the merits of such critique, given Wood’s apologetic project, one can suspect the book would have benefitted from direct and extended engagement with such interlocutors, who seem unlikely to be satisfied with his concise and persuasive defense of common human reason and human nature or his responses to non-theological “hegemonic critique.”

In any case, Wood’s patience and charitableness in the theological defense he does unfold, often in the face of rhetorical excesses, misrepresentation, and hostile dismissiveness from various anti-AT figures, is truly impressive and matched by nuanced distinction-drawing and sound, creative argument. There is more in these pages than I can detail. But his most interesting and important argument concerns his attempt to show that affirming univocity (as many analytic theologians do) with respect to “existence” or “being” in relation to God and creature does not entail either ontological or explanatory sameness, claims that God and creature exist in the same manner or count as existing for the same reasons. He builds his case by drawing on Peter van Inwagen’s interpretation of “exists” in terms of “the number of something being more than zero” (152). Since, Wood claims, numbers are obviously univocal, provided God can be counted (and don’t we *have* to affirm that simply to draw the all-important Creator/creature distinction?), we can see *both* how “exists” can be univocally predicated of God and creature *and* how doing so entails nothing more than God’s countability. Thus, it violates neither (Uniqueness) nor (Ultimacy).

While the argument has much to commend it, given its importance to the book’s projects, more development and defense would have been welcome, especially as critics will likely push back on the claim that “one” is univocally predicated of God or that “countability” is a shared human and divine property (which Wood may want to deny is itself entailed). They are unlikely to be satisfied without further explanation from Wood both of the particular philosophy of language commitments his proposal requires (e.g. does it rule out David Braine’s important distinction between *parole* and *langue* meaning?) and of how things are supposed to work on his univocal account when it comes to claims like: “God’s goodness is not other than his

existence,” “God is absolute existence,” “God exists in three persons,” etc. They will also worry that it follows, on this account, that we know what we mean when we say “God exists.” For my part, I wondered how it would handle the kind of existence denoted by *esse intentionale*, which Thomas Aquinas found conceptually invaluable.

These matters aside, Wood rightly observes that charges of “idolatry,” “ontotheology,” and the like against AT are often just pejorative attacks on analytic theologians “who den[y] that God is simple, immutable or atemporal.” But “the world,” Wood reminds, “does not divide into Thomists and idolaters” (173). That is true. Yet it may miss what at least some of these critics are driving at. Grant that AT, so long as it honors Wood’s three criteria does not constitute idolatry. Still, as Wood himself notes, “idolatry” has never been the primary descriptor for grave but recognizably Christian theological error that is judged sufficiently serious and destructive as to demand official condemnation. That category is “heresy.” Divine simplicity, immutability, and atemporality are hardly distinctively Thomist doctrines. They arguably help constitute precisely the “broadly orthodox Christian tradition” that Wood wants to claim AT belongs within (171; 261). Thus, those who want to defend the “broadly orthodox” character of AT, may do well to hear charges of “idolatry” as charges of heresy – of damaging and serious false teaching – and as a demand to show how denying, say, that God is atemporal or impassible does not amount to an unacceptable departure from mainstream Christian teaching.

In one important case, Wood’s eagerness to vindicate AT goes too far and a bit too quickly. Responding to the theological criticism that AT is spiritually sterile – or uniquely so – Wood claims that, on the contrary, AT (a) is or can be a Hadotian spiritual practice carrying forward the commitments and practice of Anselm and Aquinas and, (b) as compared to non-theological inquiry, is uniquely virtuous and good. Yet this is a case where an ‘analytic’ concern for precision, distinction-drawing, and argument could offer a helpful corrective to the objection itself.

Thus, Wood claims that “Intellectual inquiry as such presupposes a certain level of virtue, and it is always, at least implicitly ordered to God... In order to seek the truth...we must love the truth more than we love the self” and that “to seek the truth...is implicitly to seek God—surely the very essence of any Christian spiritual practice” and that “the general pursuit of truth, itself inherently virtuous, is made more virtuous in analytic theology because of its subject matter” (184). All this sounds appealing. But it claims too much and elides vital distinctions.

It is true that someone without *any* self-control cannot pursue inquiry. But this self-same, blunt capacity for self-control is no less essential for the maximally vicious in pursuit of maximally wicked ends. Inquiry and truth-seeking do not presuppose even minimal virtue but merely discipline and, perhaps, delimited, domain-specific morally-neutral capacities (e.g. listening “humbly” to *this* teacher). And such non-virtuous self-control may not even extend beyond extremely narrow confines: the most excellent, focused, and “patient” mathematics student may have the least self-control at the pub or on social media.

We must distinguish between skills (physics, knitting, AT), intellectual virtues (*sapientia* or understanding), and moral virtues (courage, justice). Whether we regard AT a skill or a *scientia* and thus an intellectual virtue, moral virtues alone, unlike *either* intellectual virtues or skills, make someone a good *person* and not merely a good physicist, knitter, or analytic theologian, in part because they dispose someone as *agent*. Simply possessing them inclines one to use them, and to use them exclusively for good ends. It is precisely the moral virtues that shape and determine our use of whatever other dispositions we have, including our skills or intellectual virtues, including our theologizing. It is not thanks to being a good analytic

theologian that one is a good person or uses those skills at the right time, in the right way, or for the right ends.

Additionally, it is true that inquiry, as truth-seeking, is an act, like almsgiving or knitting, that is *generically* good, good considered in abstraction from any agent's *actual* conduct. But no act, as performed, remains generic. Rather it is pursued in *this* place and time, for *these* reasons, by *this* person, in *this* way. Each of these is essential for determining whether that piece of conduct is good or evil, right or wrong. One can seek truth, including theological truth, for all sorts of vain and evil reasons: pride, idolatrous self-love, insecurity, a desire to serve the fascists. One can seek the truth for the right reasons but in the wrong way or at the wrong time: imperiously and abusively; when one should be caring for one's family. And one can seek truth that it is bad for one to know: how many people one can slander in a day; how your child responds to repeated, grievous harm by you. All these are equally acts of truth-seeking. But it is the movement of passions and operating of will and practical reason in relation to ends, means, and circumstances that determine their goodness and badness. Human action *as such*, good and evil alike, seeks implicitly after God, but only in a way that specifies the act as *human*. *That* sort of implicit God-seeking does not constitute action, including inquiry, as right or good. All people seek happiness, not all seek that in which happiness truly consists and thus God as God would have us seek him (ST I.II 1.7). Anyone who has spent time in the university knows that even supreme excellence in inquiry, including in theological inquiry, bears no logical or necessary connection to moral virtue or to seeking after God *in the relevant sense*. The fall itself is depicted as an act of disastrously wrong and evil theological truth-seeking.

Wood might have replied here to AT's critics that intellectual and theological inquiry, like any other generically good skill or practice, *can* become an occasion for spiritual transformation and growth, but that this depends entirely on the will's orientation to the truly good, the agent's loves. Analytic theology is no better or worse in this regard than any other sort of theology. It is enough that it seeks after the truth. Asking more of it or any kind of *inquiry* is asking far too much.

Wood's attempt to marshal Aquinas in this portion of his argument, whose views on moral virtues and their relation to intellectual virtues and skills I have just sketched above, may not reassure those historical theologians inclined to skepticism about AT. Moreover and more particularly, Aquinas does not hold "that theoretical reasoning about God can train the intellect to receive the beatific vision" (185), and it is misleading to ascribe to him the claim that "when God grants us the beatific vision, God also perfects the very same intellectual faculties we use when we practice *sacra doctrina*." For Thomas, nothing we can do or effect can prepare or train our mind to receive the beatific vision. No human knowledge is like it. It is immediate, direct, non-discursive, given by divine infusion, dependent on divinely effected transformation of the intellect for its reception, and involves God's ceaseless illumination of the intellect, and human union with God (e.g. ST I 12; III 9 and 10). It is not part of the order of nature, or even of grace, but of glory. In all these respects it is also radically unlike AT or even *sacra doctrina*. While it is true that the beatific vision perfects our intellect and involves an intellectual operation, there is no sense in which the completion or perfection which the beatific vision represents is a completion or perfection of *sacra doctrina* or of the intellectual operation involved in *sacra doctrina*. It does not stand to *sacra doctrina* or AT as adult to child, complete to incomplete, but is of an altogether entirely distinct, superior, and divine species. Very, very roughly, *sacra doctrina* is to the beatific vision something like the way that reading one, very dry, misprinted and outdated textbook about marriage and family amidst a world in which marriage and family do not exist and cannot be observed is to actually being married and having a family – only less. Additionally, Wood here seems to have collapsed Thomas's

account of the discursive operation of *ratio* in which *sacra doctrina* consists with contemplation, the simple, visional operation of *intellectus*, in which beatitude consists.

For Aquinas, apart from grace and the infusion of theological virtue, the infused moral virtues, and the spiritual gifts, we cannot even become the sort of person who will be given the beatific vision – and even that becoming holy and Christlike is not a preparation or fitting of our intellect’s operation for the beatific vision. Recall, that Thomas’s response to his own mystical experience was *not* to double down on *sacra doctrina*, which is what we would expect if there was some kind of continuity between these intellectual operations so that he might extend or deepen what had happened, or simply better prepare for what was to come, but instead to cease doing theology altogether. I have spent time on this point not primarily for historical-interpretive reasons, but out of much deeper concerns, and concerns that I think go to the heart of things. Portraying analytic or any sort of theology as preparation or training for the beatific vision risks making far too much of the activity of theology. If there is any chance at all of there being something to the charge of “idolatry” in relation to AT, it seems to me that it would be a matter of proponents of AT continuing in this direction.

These questions regarding the relation – or lack thereof – between analytic theology, virtue, and the beatific vision lead to a final question. What is the relationship between Christian identity and faith, on the one hand, and the practice of AT – or any variety of theology – on the other? This question is not directly asked or answered in the book, even as it not only philosophically and theologically interesting and salient but bears centrally on both of the book’s primary aims.

One very major objection religion and other scholars have to including theology in the university is that they believe it requires and presupposes that its students or at least its professors must be Christians. While Wood helpfully addresses worries about theology as evangelism by drawing parallels to mundane teaching concerning diverse subject matters that could, as it were, “convert” students to a given ethical, political, or metaphysical view (e.g. 273-75), there remains ambiguity in Wood’s account as to whether a practitioner of AT must or should be a believing Christian.

On the one hand, toward the end of the book, Wood mentions the possibility of some work of AT proceeding entirely conditionally, defending the *internal* coherence of a dimension of Christian theology, with the author having expressly declared himself an atheist and disavowed commitment to and/or the truth or defensibility of the premises from which the work proceeds. Wood mentions this possibility in passing, in view of defending the properly scholarly character of AT vis-à-vis standard norms of inquiry (208-10). This passage seems to suggest that one need not be a Christian to do AT and that being a Christian makes no difference to the actual content and substance of AT. This would presumably quell the worries of religion scholars – even as, we will see, it might confirm some of the worst fears of theological critics of AT.

On the other hand, many more passages in the book entail or seem to suggest the contrary. First, remarks and passages throughout the book’s latter parts explicitly frame AT in terms not only of “engaged, ‘insider’ discourse,” but as a matter of “positive,” “appreciative,” “conserving,” “guarding,” “protecting” scholarly work in relation to broadly Christian orthodoxy and to defending its coherence, plausibility, and truth (276-79). Indeed, this vision of AT, and its contrast with the study of religion as critical, non-religious, non-apologetic, is essential to the book’s defense of AT against many of its theological critics. Second, the thrust of the first two-thirds of the book not only resonates with this but culminates in what we have already examined: claims that AT is an inherently virtuous form of God-seeking and an especially potent Christian spiritual practice that literally trains the mind for the beatific vision.



Third, Wood invokes Aquinas to argue for a distinction between theology and philosophy in terms of the one proceeding from revelation and the other from reason alone. He then explains: “One can easily convert theology to philosophy (or vice versa) simply by treating one’s supposedly revealed premises as conditional. So, I am doing theology if I say: ‘God exists and became incarnate...therefore *p*, *q*, and *r*.’” In contrast, he continues, I am doing philosophy if I make that premise merely conditional, and proceed from there (48-9). This is precisely the case mentioned above, only now with the opposite verdict. Here, treating the premises purely hypothetically and its being the case that just *anyone* can do the practice, irrespective of faith, renders the practice philosophy, while being a Christian and believing the premises constitutes the activity as theology. There, this does nothing to change the inquiry’s status as theology, and anyone, Christian or not, can do Christian theology.

Skeptical scholars might wonder whether baptism is the price of admission to doing theology or doing it well. Carrying forward this line of thought, they might raise numerous objections: from concerns about (allegedly) insidious religious discrimination to insisting that an intellectual practice rooted in and centrally implicating a person’s most fundamental and all-encompassing commitments cannot help but lead to distortion and motivated reasoning. Such objections go beyond Bertrand Russell’s (in)famous dismissal of Aquinas as not really possessed of the “philosophical spirit” to the suggestion that when it comes to AT, intellectually corrupting motivated reasoning is baked into the practice. Is Wood’s (Worship) criterion, for example, a prerequisite for doing AT (well), they might ask? If so, how is having done the work with a certain religious *attitude* a properly *scholarly* or *intellectual* standard? And could it not corrupt or artificially limit an appropriately open-ended operation of rational inquiry to possess an exclusively reverential attitude?

Further, pressing Wood’s analogy between AT and analytic philosophy, critics may claim a very important disanalogy. Within contemporary philosophy, for nearly every controversial ethical, political, metaphysical, or epistemological position “conserved,” constructed, or shown coherent, there are at least as many and often more philosophers explicitly writing to discredit, undermine, attack, and critique that position and/or to propose some entirely divergent or opposed alternative. While there are, of course, subfields like Rawlsian political philosophy where almost no one disputes basic Rawlsian premises, zooming outward on almost any matter of interest in analytic philosophy there are lively arguments and radically divergent and contrary views. And, arguably, even the most devout Rawlsian scholastic will on occasion – and perhaps in especially important and consequential professional settings – be forced to defend her basic Rawlsian commitments in the face of strong and thoughtful objections *from fellow philosophers* who understand and vehemently reject her fundamental commitments and are equally skilled in the style of argument and reasoning she herself practices. The critic might thus ask: How, in these regards, do things stand with AT? Are there as many or *any* analytic theologians challenging, questioning, or attempting to discredit and disprove or offer entirely religiously distinct theological visions over against the “broadly orthodox” Christianity within which Wood describes AT as unfolding?

Famously (or infamously), in analytic philosophy whole literatures are devoted to discrediting especially influential proposals by adducing counter-examples. Careers (of a sort) can be built on this. Those doing this work, including those who do *only* this work, are no less truly practicing analytic philosophy (if not love of wisdom). But does it count as AT if one adopts an analogous posture and practice, always and only aiming to disprove and discredit whatever positive proposal or creedal affirmation Christians express? If not, is this not a salient difference as compared to analytic philosophy as a discipline? And, in any case, doesn’t this have everything to do with the intersection between the practice of AT and Christian religious

commitments and identity – which, in virtue of being a whole-life-encompassing, communal, ritual- and practice-involving, global institutionalized living religious tradition is altogether unlike, say, intense Kantianism or devout commitment to possible world semantics?

From the opposite side, Christian theologians may have their own concerns about the relation of Christian identity and commitment to the practice of AT. In my experience, many academic theologians believe that being a Christian is, in some way, necessary, important, or at least makes a determinate difference for the doing of theology. They believe there is something about the theology *itself* – its substance and claims – that is or should be different between theology done by someone who is a believing Christian possessed of grace and someone who is not, if they believe the latter can even do theology. I have yet to see a contemporary account or argument that offers a determinate answer to just what this concrete difference amounts to, how exactly the substance and content of theology differ depending on whether the person doing it is or is not actually a Christian, or what the mechanisms for this would be. It is unclear where Wood situates himself on this matter.

As we have seen, he clearly envisions theology as making a difference to a person's spiritual life. But it is unclear whether or how he envisions a person's spiritual life or faith making a difference to their theology in terms of its substance or content (in distinction from the attitude they have in doing it). The preponderance of evidence seems to suggest that Wood thinks doing AT requires actual Christian commitment. That is certainly one kind of difference – you cannot so much as do Christian theology at all if you aren't a Christian. But it's not the kind of difference we are asking about, nor does Wood mean it to be. Still, if it makes no determinate difference to the substance of theology whether one actually believes it or not, what is the point and significance of insisting that only Christians can do it? That starts to seem like purely a stipulative terminological claim, and one that marks a distinction without a difference.

It is significant in regard to these matters that Wood grounds his account of AT in a theology of creation and fall – alone. This is so even as he avails himself of distinctively Christological and Trinitarian points in filling out that vision of creation. But it is exclusively a vision of *creation* and *fall* – and not of redemption or salvation as well – that funds his foundational vision of the doing of AT and of the person who does it. And with respect to creation and fall, taken in isolation, Christians and non-Christians are on entirely equal footing. That is, if we view humans exclusively as created and fallen, we are not viewing Christians as any different from non-Christians or even viewing *Christians* and *non-Christians* at all. If creation and fall are the only theological realities – our being creatures who bear God's image yet sinful and fallen – that matter in terms of shaping the identity and capacity of the person who does theological activity, as *agent* of theology, then perhaps it is no surprise that we cannot notice or give an account of any difference between Christian and non-Christian qua theologian, including between a given individual as compared to Christian and non-Christian versions of themselves. But, of course, Christians believe not only in creation and fall but, famously, in redemption, salvation, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Are *those* realities not relevant for the Christian qua *agent* of theology? Can they be ignored and bracketed as not effecting a difference or transformation worth attending to when it comes to the very act of theologizing? If one imagines doing analytic theology as spiritually impactful and significant, making a difference to spiritual life, it seems exceedingly odd not to imagine the holistic activity of spiritual life and Christian identity having at least as much impact on the doing of AT. For, surely, things like Scripture, the Eucharist, and the internal work of the Holy Spirit are more spiritually significant than the doing of analytic or any other sort of theology.

To be very clear, Wood is hardly unique in not taking up these questions, which are, as far as I can tell, widely neglected if not ignored in contemporary academic theology. But these questions are, I think, particularly relevant to his dual tasks and may in fact force a choice that few of us may want to make.

So far as I can tell, if one wants to claim some sort of difference between the content or substance of Christian theology produced by Christian and non-Christian (the Christian and non-Christian versions of a given individual), then one will need to begin to explore and unfold an account of the action and work of grace in the Christian life. In particular, it seems one may need to claim that God effects some transformative difference or gifting to at least some Christian theologians, enabling them to do things that, apart from that divine activity, they otherwise could not do. It will be tempting here for some to immediately begin to talk about non-contrastive accounts of God or divine transcendence. But that will be to get things rather backwards. Recall that, as Kathryn Tanner herself makes clear, a non-contrastive account hardly rules out the reality (which Christians have always affirmed) of some created effects having *exclusively* Divine causes. Rather its central point is to emphasize that even those created effects that *do* have created causes always *also* have equally active Divine causes. If the move is to claim that any and all differences between non-Christians and Christian or Christian/non-Christian versions of the same theology-producing individual have created causes, then we are, functionally speaking, right back where we started. Worse than that, we are on the verge of making Divine causes into a difference that never make a perceptible difference. While that is familiar theological territory for some traditions, it is not the direction in which AT has seem especially inclined.

The alternative, which is the one Aquinas embraced, along with the vast majority of theologians down through the centuries, is to claim that at least some Christians and at least some Christian theologians, by the gift of certain gratuitous graces and by the supernatural operation of infused virtues and the spiritual gifts, have been enabled and equipped to do more and better theologizing than they otherwise could – or even more and better than any unredeemed human otherwise could. Thomas's theology, after all, was declared a miracle, possible only because of gracious divine activity transcending the possibilities and limits of human nature.

Are academic Christian theologians perhaps embarrassed to claim such things? If so, does that have anything to do with the relation in which theology stands to the university or with the desire to show that it truly belongs and is not all that different or strange as compared to other disciplines? Or does it have to do with the desire to keep its strange and ostensibly implausible or laughable claims safely confined to apparently distant, far-removed premises – Trinity, Christology – with seemingly little clear or immediate relevance?

I do not know. Nor do I know how best to think about these matters or whether theologians ought to claim that it makes a difference to the substance and content of theology that it be done by a Christian – which is a vitally different and much harder question than whether one needs to be a Christian to do good Christian theology (one does not). What I do know is that it would be fascinating for analytic theologians to explore this line of questioning, and, based on his impressive, carefully argued, illuminating, richly interdisciplinary, and unfailingly charitable book, if I could suggest an analytic theologian to help in leading the charge, William Wood would be an outstanding choice.