

# Demarcating the Foundations of Analytic Theology and Philosophical Theology

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**ABSTRACT** Analytic theology is a thriving research program at the intersection of theology and analytic philosophy. Prior to Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea’s launch of “analytic theology” in 2009, the discipline functioned under the moniker “philosophical theology.” Considerable ink has been spilled on what is analytic theology in the past decade, and most recently by William Wood (2021). Some theologians (e.g., Abraham 2009) have argued that it is systematic theology while others (e.g., Coakley 2013) have been content to remain in a family resemblance class rooted in philosophical theology. At the same time, analytic theology has welcomed Christian philosophers (e.g., Beall 2021) who have migrated into Christian doctrine via philosophy of religion. These philosophers are not systematic theologians, but, rather, philosophical theologians. This essay analyzes the relation between analytic theology, philosophical theology, and philosophy by examining their starting points and how they perceive and access truth, and then proposes a spectrum to graph their overlapping zones of research. I conclude that philosophical theology stands at the heart of the disciplines and thus remains an appropriate term for analytic theologians and Christian philosophers working somewhere in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

**KEYWORDS** analytic theology; Christian philosophy; methodology; philosophical theology; revelation; spectrum; truth

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## INTRODUCTION

In this essay I will explore the relation between analytic theology, philosophical theology, and Christian philosophy. In doing so, I will not explicate a definition of analytic theology.<sup>1</sup> Rather, my analysis will focus on several aspects of the relationship analytic theology has to neighboring philosophical disciplines. Broadly, it is a work in metatheological and metaphilosophical methodology.<sup>2</sup> My aim is to identify what zone of research Christian theologians and philosophers refer to when they speak of analytic theology and how it might best be located in practice and discourse among those in and outside the academy.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009 theologian Oliver Crisp and philosopher Michael Rea launched a strategic research program termed “analytic theology.” In one short decade, this discipline (or sub-discipline) has accrued a significant amount of literature and it shows no sign of waning.<sup>4</sup> A critical question that remains unsettled by both philosophers and theologians, however, is, “What is analytic theology?” Is it theology? That is, is it “theological theology” in the words of theologian John Webster, cited by analytic theologian Tom McCall (2015, 161).<sup>5</sup> Or, is analytic theology merely analytic philosophy or philosophy of religion, i.e., the practice of philosophers working toward conceptual clarity ahistorically in disconnect from

1. Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea’s (2009, 4–6) description of analytic theology includes roughly two ambitions: (i) to identify the limits of our knowledge of the world, and (ii) to provide true explanatory theories for such analyses that fall outside the natural sciences, and five stylistic points: (P1) write sentences that can be formalized and logically manipulate, (P2) prioritize clarity and logical coherence, (P3) avoid metaphor over propositional content, (P4) utilize known primitive concepts, and (P5) treat conceptual analysis as a source of evidence.

See William Wood (2021, 48–53) for a current assimilation of definitions summarized in what he cites as the definition of the Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology Series (OSAT): “Analytic theology utilizes the tools and methods of contemporary analytic philosophy for the purposes of constructive Christian theology, paying attention to the Christian tradition and the development of doctrine.”

2. A reviewer helpfully suggested this classification of “metaphilosophical methodology”; “metatheological” is adopted from Rea (2021, 2). Another reviewer suggested “foundations” for the title. I appreciate the comments of both anonymous reviewers throughout; the essay is better for it.

3. My reference to “outside the academy” refers to the church and society, such that as theology, analytic or philosophical theology ought also to “seek to serve the church and change the world” (McCall 2015, 15–59, 123). For apologetic influence see Coakley (2013, 606–7).

4. As evidence of current literature see e.g., the Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology, series eds., Rea and Crisp; the *Journal of Analytic Theology*; James Arcadi and James Turner, Jr. (2021).

5. See also McCall (2015, 21–22, 178). See Wood (2021, 51–53) for analytic theology becoming more theological..

theology?<sup>6</sup> To this point, William Abraham (2009), Oliver Crisp (2019, 15–32) and others (Crisp, Arcadi and Wessling 2019, 33–54) have argued that analytic theology is, or done properly is, systematic theology. Thus, they have argued that locating analytic theology (AT) under or within the task of systematic theology (ST) properly safeguards AT from theologians’ objections and the “god of the philosophers.” Yet, is this all that AT is? A contemporary Christian analytic philosopher (e.g., Plantinga, Craig, or Swinburne), for example, working roughly from the mindset of a traditional philosophical theologian (e.g., Augustine, Anselm, or Aquinas), perhaps having migrated beyond work common to philosophy of religion and into Christian doctrine, might wonder if AT is merely ST—that is, if the work they engage as a Christian philosopher is ST? or, rather, is it philosophical theology (PT)?<sup>7</sup>

Crisp (2022) has recently argued in “Metatheology” that a philosophy of theology can be demarcated from an expansive view of theology (e.g., where theology is inclusive of “divinity,” is confessional, includes sacred doctrine and various subdisciplines: biblical, systematic, historical, etc.) thus creating space for the study of the conceptual foundations of theology.<sup>8</sup> Within this conceptual space shared by the philosopher and the theologian, I will explore two questions regarding the relationship between analytic theology and philosophy, (1) how closely ought AT need be considered ST? and, (2) is AT more aptly termed PT?

By way of analyzing the relation between AT and ST and AT and PT, I will explore two lines of inquiry. In section one I will examine the starting points for AT (and PT) and P (i.e., philosophy). I assume the Christian theologian’s stance to be within the faith. Hence, divine revelation is available to the practitioner who also operates with some view of metaphysical realism and truth-aptness (e.g., Crisp [2009b, 49–50] suggests a correspondence theory of truth.<sup>9</sup> In section two I will propose a spectrum that seeks to better qualify the task of AT in relation to overlapping disciplines, e.g., theology, philosophical theology, philosophy of religion, and philosophy. My consensus is that PT has more resources available to the practitioner of AT than ST and is better apt to house the family resemblance of AT inclusive of P and thereby the relevant work of philosophers who are clearly not systematic

6. For the ahistorical objection see Wood (2021, 14–18); McCall (2015, 27–29, 83–91). See similar objections (and one specifically about metaphysics) in Crisp (2009b, 36–38, 50–53).

7. Davis and Yang’s (2020) view of PT intersects with AT in distinction from ST.

8. I would argue that the conceptual space required for metatheology is largely centered around PT on the spectrum in figure 1, section II, below.

9. See: nn. 16,18.

theologians (e.g., Koons 2022; Beall 2021, etc.).<sup>10</sup> Finally, it should be noted that given the tight overlap of AT and PT, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably as is the case in the literature.<sup>11</sup>

### I. STARTING POINTS FOR AT AND P

In this section I will analyze the starting points for AT (and PT) and P. I will include a brief account of the accessibility of knowledge and truth available to each and the dependency relation each has to truth. My use of the terms “analytic theology” and “philosophical theology” will locate within the Christian tradition and will assume an “active faith.”<sup>12</sup> This stance is not unlike William Wood’s (2016, 255) “substantive model.” Similar to Crisp et al., Wood (2016, 257) states that “while it is true that in principle a theologian could use analytic philosophy in the service of any theological agenda, in fact analytic theology as it is actually practiced ... defend[s] the rationality of traditional Christian orthodoxy.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, orthodoxy assumes faith. Likewise, Crisp et al. (2019, 20–25) make it apparent elsewhere that the practitioner of analytic theology (as declarative theology) presupposes faith. This stands in contrast to analytic philosophy per Rea’s (2009, 4) seminal “Introduction” to *Analytic Theology*, where he refers to two ambitions of the analytic

10. See also e.g., Fuqua and Koons (2023); Beall (2023).

11. Generally, what goes for AT follows for PT, but not always vice versa. I leave it to the reader to observe the sense of usage in context where I have not flagged them with “or” or “and.” Examples in the literature include: Crisp and Rea, eds. (2009), *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*; Crisp, ed. (2009a), *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*; select contents of Flint and Rea, eds. (2009), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*; McCall’s (2015, 15, n. 12, 178) signposting: “Where we are: Philosophical theology and analytic theology,” and his use of AT and PT interchangeably in his conclusion; and Wood’s (2021, 7, n. 7) reference to PT literature that might be AT, and his introduction where he states: “At the moment there is no sharp distinction between ‘analytic theology’ and ‘analytic philosophical theology’” (8).

12. In contrast to a broader pluralistic definition of philosophical theology whose starting points are inside and outside various traditions, which in my view aligns more closely with philosophy of religion, I am making the further distinction, here, that to be “inside” is to practice with an active faith. Alternatively, see Taliaferro and Meister (2016, 2, 6–8).

A reviewer questioned whether an atheistic philosopher who contributes arguments for theism would locate within PT. On the view here, these cases generally locate in PR or do so to a greater or lesser degree on the spectrum below (see fig. 1, sec. II), and ought to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Several things could be said about the philosopher and the content of the argument, but my main concern is that faith is intrinsic to PT and that revelation is accessible.

13. See Wood n. 14. Crisp et al. (2019, 11) state that analytic theology does not require Christian faith. There are Jewish and Muslim analytic theologians, “although the overwhelming majority of analytic theologians are rooted within the Christian tradition.” My broader point here is that irrespective of one’s declared religion, faith is generally a common assumption in theology, outliers withstanding.

philosopher. Roughly, these are: (1) to identify the limits of our knowledge of the world, and (2) to provide “true explanatory theories” for such analyses that fall outside the natural sciences. Rea makes no mention of faith or Christian orthodoxy. My main point here is that faith is prior to analytic or philosophical method appropriated by the theologian and any talk about an analytic or philosophical theology ought to assume a practitioner’s faith.

The starting points for analytic or philosophical theology and philosophy differ, therefore. P, for example, ought to hold that “God exists is true” if and only if evidence warrants such a proposition and not because revelation declares it. Conversely, PT, on the above view, holds that what revelation declares is true and that a coherent view of reality will take such truths into account.<sup>14</sup> Hence, P might ascertain biblical declarations to be true, but it starts independent of or outside of declarations of Scripture perceived as truth. PT, however, having been previously convinced that Scripture is true, it starts with biblical truth and philosophical truth on even ground, as expressed in the Augustinian maxim “all truth is God’s truth.” Thus, P starts outside Scripture and points at all else, and PT starts inside Scripture and outside Scripture and points at whatever.

Lurking in the background, the critic of PT (or AT) might object that PT is beholden to philosophical reasoning or what Wood (2021, 102–06) refers to as “autonomous reason.”<sup>15</sup> Lest the Christian falsely believe that PT or AT is somehow degrading truth to P, I will now provide a brief analysis of the dual grounding of truth before returning to the starting points of P and PT above. My main focus will be the dependence relation truth has to reality, not an explication of a theory of truth.<sup>16</sup> To minimize confusion I will

14. See Max Baker-Hytch’s (2016, 350–59) discussion on the use of Scripture in analytical theology for a similar distinction. Wood (2021, 50, 53) explicitly states that AT is Christian theology and therefore it “begins with an epistemic posture of assent to scripture and tradition. . . . it assumes their truth and then tries to understand them.” Similarly, regarding formal reasoning and truth, Wood thinks that if one holds a Christian doctrine of creation and a weak view of realism, that “we should expect it to be the case that at some very basic level, the norms of reasoning are universally valid. And that is, in fact, what we do observe” (94–96). See also McCall (2015, 37–57, 178); Davis and Yang (2020, 21–24).

I appreciate a reviewer’s suggestion for a more sophisticated articulation of PT including the coherence of logic and revelation. I have attempted to capture that understanding while emphasizing the explicit relation of revelation to PT. I would also add, in line with Wood’s “expectation” above and in keeping with “faith seeking understanding,” that PT ought to anticipate revealed truths evidenced in reality.

15. Wood cites Andrew Moore’s (2007, 397–400) critique; this is especially relevant in respect to Moore’s view of Swinburne’s use of reason.

16. For the dependence relation of truth to reality and correspondence theory see Joshua Rasmussen (2013, 2014). See also Rea for discussion and alternative views (2021, 64–69).

signify philosophical truth grounded in the world as  $T-W$  and revelation as truth grounded in God as  $T-R$ , and truth simpliciter, or truth qua truth grounded in reality as  $T-S$ . My aim here is to illuminate the Augustinian unity of truth in reality and thus show the bridge between P and T (i.e., theology) central to PT or AT.<sup>17</sup>

Connected to this concept of PT being grounded in *truth* that coexists in both T and P, is Oliver Crisp's (2012, 176, 181–82) view that “the analytic [philosophical] theologian should adopt a correspondence theory of truth” and that “theologians ought to be [metaphysical] realists about the world.”<sup>18</sup> One reason for this, for the theologian in particular but also the Christian philosopher, seems to pertain to the dependence relation that truth has with the world ( $T-W$ ) and revelation ( $T-R$ ) has with God. Logically, this relation must be coextensive if “truth” simpliciter ( $T-S$ ) is to track in both P and T in an Augustinian manner.

One concern, here, might be that the origin of revelation ( $T-R$ ) is grounded in God and not in the world. However, if God is included as a real existent in the total set of reality along with the world he created, then the origin of  $T-R$  in T doesn't impinge on  $T-W$  in P.<sup>19</sup> Hence, whether truth ( $T-R$ ) originated in or from God as revelation, or truth ( $T-W$ ) is discovered by a philosopher in the world, insofar as it is “truth” ( $T-S$ ) is the fact that it has a dependence relation to reality. Thus,  $T-R$  is primarily grounded in its relation to God and secondarily in relation to the world; and  $T-W$  is primarily grounded in the world and secondarily in its relation to God. Hence, both share a dependency relation to reality qua reality. It just so happens, that

17. This concept of AT or PT acting as a natural bridge among disciplines is evidenced by Wood's (2021, v, 4, 299) description—“an exercise in bridge-building”—of his recent book *Analytic Theology and the Study of Religion*.

18. See also Crisp (2009b, 35, 49–50); Wood (2021, 12, 18, 93–94). See: n. 16.

19. I am aware that the theologian might have concerns about ontotheology and univocity, such that God has been degraded to another being in the world. I have not engaged this concern here, but from what I have said I am only committed to the fact that God exists and has an essential relation to reality. Both of these claims seem necessarily true for the Christian. I have left it open as to how exactly God occupies or inhabits reality or what “location” God might have in respect to the world. Undeniably, if God exists and the world exists, on the scheme here both share some relation to reality. This need not commit one to a view such that because the Creator and creature have a relation to reality, the Creator is degraded to an equal with creation—a being among like beings, so to say. This would only be true if reality qua reality were substantively on par with creation (or created existence), but I have not committed to what “reality” is metaphysically. If this were the case, however, then insofar as God exists, God would necessarily fail to be “other” given existence qua existence would commit God to creaturely being. But, again, none of this follows from what I have said above. For a thorough discussion on ontotheology and univocity (and semantic univocity and ontological sameness) in respect to analytic philosophical theology see Wood (2021, 18–19, 130–58).

reality is greater than the sum of empirically quantifiable facts.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, when the Augustinian maxim—“all truth is God’s truth”—is employed, it is done so with the assumption that there is some coextensive property of “truth” (*T-S*) which is exemplifiable across the various registers (or full set) of reality. Albeit, the common theological usage moves through the set of reality from God–reality to world–reality (*T to P*), whereas in philosophical usage the move is from world–reality to God–reality (*P to T*).

The point here for the Christian, then, is that insofar as truth (*T-S*) is grounded in reality, because God is the preeminent reality and progenitor of the world–reality, any truth grounded in reality qua reality ultimately has some dependence relation to God.<sup>21</sup> In other terms, because God has an essential relation to reality, and the world–reality has: (a) a non-essential relation to reality, and (b) is necessarily dependent on reality insofar as it is real; it can be concluded that, (c) necessarily, world–reality is dependent on God’s essential relation to reality.<sup>22</sup> Thus, insofar as truth (*T-S*) exists in the world it is dependent on God’s relation to reality.<sup>23</sup>

A further discussion will engage what theory of truth one accepts and the location of the dependency relation, i.e., where or in what manner it is grounded in reality.<sup>24</sup> Setting this aside, and positing a correspondent

20. I have left the definition of reality open (see: nn. 19, 21). On the view here, I would want to say that reality is roughly the foundation of all existence. See related discussion on fundamentality and reality in Tuomas Tahko (2018); a current breadth of related literature on metaphysical grounding, dependence, structure, relations, operations, being, etc., exists that is beyond my scope here (e.g., Correia and Schnieder 2012; McDaniel 2017; Bliss and Priest 2018; Glick, Darby, and Marmodoro 2020).

21. The statement “God is the preeminent reality” might also be read as “God is the preeminent existent” if one is concerned that God is conflated with creation on a view of reality such that reality is merely existence, but this is not the view here (see: nn. 19–20). Hence, there is a sense that God is on par with reality, only I have yet to define the nature of reality or God’s relation to reality. I will not speculate more here.

22. Biblically, this concept of world–reality’s dependence upon God is illuminated in texts like Colossians 1:17—“[H]e [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together,” and Hebrews 1:3—“[H]e [Christ] upholds the universe by the word of his power.” Further, Christian orthodoxy assumes that the fundamental claims the bible makes about reality and God’s relation to reality ought to be accepted as true. Again, this presumes a starting point for AT and PT within the faith.

23. Similarly, the theologian might argue that because God is omniscient—i.e., his knowledge encompasses all of reality including the world—and transcendent, it is not unreasonable to say, therefore, that all truth (*T-S*) is grounded in reality and God.

24. Limiting my discussion here to a correspondence theory vs. a coherentist theory, roughly a coherentist grounds truth in propositions or beliefs entailing the agent’s belief structure, while a correspondence theorist grounds truth in the world (or revelation in God) thus preserving the agent’s accidental relation to the world. Truth is not grounded in the agent but the agent stands in an informing relation to truth, i.e., as one being informed by truth.

theorist's objective grounding of truth makes truth applicable and accessible universally. This is ultimately what a philosopher, theologian, or scientist wants—a theory of truth that aligns with how truth actually functions in reality and is operational and reliable across disciplines. Further, the theologian is keen to the view that truth ( $T-W$ ) and revelation ( $T-R$ ) have universal bearing across all of reality and for all persons at all times.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in light of the views of theologians and philosophers like Crisp and Rea,<sup>26</sup> the grounding and location of truth is critical for the practice of AT or PT insofar as truth claims bear on P and T, and for the identification of P and PT (and AT).<sup>27</sup>

Returning to my starting points, then, remember that P starts outside Scripture and points at all else, and PT or AT starts inside Scripture and outside Scripture and points at whatever. To be clear, however, I am not saying that revelation is not available to P; it is, and it might factor into P's evidence for truth, but it is not a starting point of truth.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, because

Therefore, the distinction is preserved between the agent's belief structure and the world, and the dependency relation of truth is grounded in an objective, rather than subjective fact of reality. See Rea for alternatives (2021, 68–69).

In response, an objection might be raised against God's subjective relation to truth via reality qua reality. However, truth grounded in God is in reality whereas truth grounded in the human agent is in the world. Again, this distinction carves along the essential vs. nonessential relation to reality—God has an essential relation to reality while the created agent has a nonessential relation to the world and reality. Hence, truth, as a dependency relation, can be objectively grounded in the world and simultaneously grounded subjectively in God's "mind." Nothing illogical follows from this dual grounding of truth given God's knowledge quantifies over all of reality, of which the world and the created agent stand in nonessential relations to reality.

For correspondence theory and alternative views (e.g., pragmatism, verificationist, deflationary, identity, truthmaker, etc.) see Marian David (2022). See: nn. 16, 18.

25. See Wood's (2021, 92–96) discussion on realism and universal reason. See: n. 14.

26. See Rea (2021, 7–8, 19–35, 64–69) for discussion on theological and metaphysical realism and anti-realism, and truth. This relation between truth and reality can be thought to have even greater reach; e.g., philosopher E.J. Lowe (2011) thinks that it is metaphysics or formal ontology that upholds philosophy and the natural sciences.

27. See a similar point about AT's emphasis on truth claims about God and reality by Wood (2021, 18).

28. If this view is correct, then two things follow for the philosopher. First, when the Christian philosopher practices philosophy *Christianly* they ought to adopt the same stance toward truth as the philosophical theologian. However, when the Christian philosopher practices philosophy qua philosophy, then they ought to take the stance whereby they "put off" this relation to truth (i.e., the starting point inside Scripture) and "put on" or stand in the philosopher simpliciter's shoes adopting the view that while Scripture might be true, it might not be true. To the degree that a Christian philosopher can adopt this stance of "putting on" and "taking off" their Christian view of truth—call it "adoptive stance"—will be the degree to which he or she can practice philosophy Christianly or simpliciter. Second, given this adoptive stance, it is essential that philosophers be explicit about what mode of practice

PT starts with this dual-legged base of truth, it will be required by the practitioner of PT to state what is entailed by his or her particular view of Scripture and tradition. Therefore, given the above discussion on starting points, the dual sources of truth, and the dependency relation of truth to reality, hopefully some distance has been reached on how closely AT ought to be considered ST. If AT is to make truth claims at the intersection of analytic philosophy and theology, it requires an essential relation to P. Per my analysis, ST provides little data to measure AT in this regard.<sup>29</sup> AT's correlation with PT is much more articulate in relation to P. That is, AT as ST has little to say in relation to P, whereas PT is insightful. It is to this direct relationship between PT and P we turn now.

## II. PT ON A SPECTRUM WITH T AND P

In this section I will graph PT (and AT) on a spectrum in relation to their neighboring disciplines T through P. In what follows, similar to Sarah Coakley and as noted above, I am not so much concerned about a proper definition for analytic or philosophical theology.<sup>30</sup> Rather, I am more concerned with establishing and clarifying the relationship PT has with its neighboring disciplines. This includes its overlap with philosophy of science.<sup>31</sup> More primary, however, is the direct relationship theology has to philosophy and philosophy of religion. My aim is to demonstrate this relationship in hopes of bringing clarity to the function of PT (and AT) in respect to P. I will begin with a brief introduction of origins.

Philosophy, derived from its Greek roots *philo* and *sophia*, simply means “the love of wisdom.” While this definition does not articulate the contemporary practice of analytic philosophy, it does capture the philosopher’s general aim to best comprehend reality and to believe and act accordingly.<sup>32</sup> It also coincides with the Anselmian idea of “faith seeking understanding”

they are engaging at a given time. The spectrum in section II (figure 1) can aid the philosopher in better identifying their zone of practice. In sum, the philosopher’s relation to, or view of truth, is foundational to his or her given practice of philosophy.

29. See: n. 7. I realize this analysis is limited in scope and the theologian may want to include additional data from T to bolster the argument for ST—e.g., see Crisp et al. (2019). My analysis is strictly assessing the essential foundations of the truth claims AT requires to function at the intersection of analytic philosophy and theology. Hence, my focus is directed at accounting for P in union with T, and not filling out a view of T as others (e.g., Abraham, Crisp, McCall, Wood) have already done.

30. Sarah Coakley (2013, 601–03) argues that nailing down “one essentialist definition” for analytic theology might be unfruitful.

31. More on this below; see: n. 39.

32. See philosophy as wisdom in Taliaferro and Meister (2016, 1–2).

and the biblical idea that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prv 9:10).<sup>33</sup> Lest it appear that I have conflated philosophy with theology, what I am suggesting is that in a similar way to which philosophy, by its very root, is the love of wisdom, so also does theology attend to wisdom. Yet, it does so not solely out of a love for wisdom itself, but out of a love for God. The commonality of wisdom or the “love of wisdom,” therefore, is shared by both philosophy and theology. Thus, philosophy has or is a direct access point to wisdom, and theology is a two-step access to wisdom. Theology might further argue, however, that because God himself is the “only wise God” (Rom 16:27) and because wisdom is “with God” and “belongs to God” (Job 12:13; Dan 2:20); i.e., because wisdom is intrinsically bound up with God, that when Proverbs instructs one to love wisdom above all else and to get “her” into one’s heart, and cherish “her” all one’s days (Prv 3–5, 8), that there is a direct relation to God. Hence, the theologian might say, on fairly sure footing, that at the apex of philosophy—the “love of wisdom”—one is faced with God.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, much would be entailed in this vision ... namely, the philosopher’s heart! Yet, if this is accurate, then theology too, has or is a direct access to wisdom.

Thus, what I am seeking to draw our attention to is the symbiotic relation between philosophy and theology and the conceptual space they occupy.<sup>35</sup> One way to illuminate this relation is to analyze their distinct and overlapping zones of practice. This leads me to a further distinction regarding philosophical theology and analytical theology. PT might be considered a “thicker” view of theology than analytic theology, which functions as a narrower variety or perhaps a subdiscipline of philosophical theology.<sup>36</sup> Ergo, my use of PT is purposeful for several reasons:

First, by using the term “philosophical theology” I am seeking to capture the symbiotic relationship with wisdom mentioned above. Second, and without getting into an excursus on disciplines, PT and AT might refer to the same practice by some if PT and AT’s methods of analysis, tools, and

33. Wood argues that AT is a “traditional form of faith seeking understanding.” Wood cites Tim Pawl’s *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* (2016) as an example. See Wood (2021, 17, 53–61, n. 10, 290).

34. Wood (2014, 54) makes a similar point concerning truth: “Some might go still further and embrace the ancient and medieval claim that the desire for truth is the desire for God because God is truth itself.<sup>12</sup> On this understanding, when we seek the truth, we also, by that very fact, seek God.” (Wood refers to Aquinas in his “footnote 12” and cites himself, 2013.)

35. Wood (2021, 48) explicitly states that “there are no absolute, fixed boundaries between philosophy and theology.”

36. For example, see Wood’s (2021, 6–10) discussion “on the ‘narrowness’ of analytic philosophy of religion.”

objectives are similar enough. Personally, I would generally have no reason to object to AT’s five stylistic points or two ambitions as articulated by Rea.<sup>37</sup> However, AT could be categorized as a specific subdiscipline of PT by others.<sup>38</sup> If the latter is the case, then constraints have been placed on the “philosophy” component of PT, by limiting it to strictly analytic philosophy. Such a restriction might be unnecessary however, nor always fruitful to the essential theological task or the practice of a particular theologian.

Lastly, when I use the term “philosophical theology,” what I am referring to as “philosophical” is the position of PT in relation to T, P, and PR (i.e., philosophy of religion) on a spectrum. As noted above, because theologians’ interests often overlap with science (S), in addition to religion (R), the relation of PT to philosophy of science (PS) appears to be another direct and fruitful relationship such that T engages S at PT.<sup>39</sup> Hence, in my mind, mapping the distinct and overlapping zones of these neighboring disciplines is helpful both internally and externally to better identify the practice of each discipline and in particular PT. Thus, a linear spectrum of T–P might be graphed in the following manner (Figure 1):

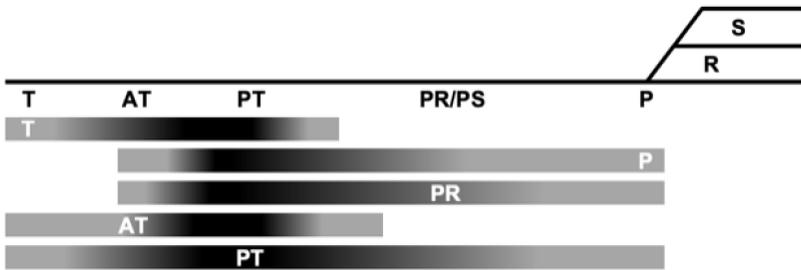


Figure 1. *Linear spectrum of disciplines in relation to analytic theology and philosophical theology*

As the above spectrum demonstrates the location of PT identifies the relationship that exists between PT, T and P. I will reference AT below. Of primary note, is that P, PR, and PT all include “P.” T (and AT) does not. This is critical for several reasons: First, PT overlaps across the whole spectrum from T to P with the greatest degree of overlap at PT. Hence, PT’s location

37. Rea’s (2009, 3–4) points have been reiterated by all as the benchmark for AT (see: n. 1).

38. Crisp et al. (2019, 24) depict “analytic” as a version of philosophy among other candidates, e.g., “Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, or Phenomenology.”

39. Likewise, other disciplines such as Cognitive Science or Psychology could intersect at P and locate at PR. See Coakley (2013, 607) for the positive relation of PT to the sciences. See also current work in science-engaged theology by Perry and Leidenhag (2021, 2023); Page (2023).

is unique and central; it is perhaps the heart of the relationship between the disciplines.<sup>40</sup> As the heart of the disciplines, philosophical theology rests in a marriage that naturally shares a more intimate bed than the subservient call of theology—i.e., “philosophy is the handmaiden to the Queen of the Sciences.” However, if Crisp et al. (2019, 42) are correct, and I wholeheartedly agree that they are, in saying that “all theologians use philosophical ideas, and very often align themselves with one or more philosophical tradition.”<sup>41</sup> If so, given the clear understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology there should be no worry about the locality of P in PT. Second, PT identifies the direct relationship to the other relevant forms of P, and specifically PR (and PS).

Third, it is not certain where AT would sit on this spectrum? Would it sit more properly between T and PT at the edge of the overlap between disciplines? Or, would it supervene on T? Or subsist under PT? A concern, here, might be that AT could be a mode of T by simply doing T analytically.<sup>42</sup> If this were the case, then AT would differ from PT which assumes a degree of P.<sup>43</sup> Hence, AT could be such that P never enters into it.<sup>44</sup> Further, and a more realistic concern, is that by demarcating PT as AT, PT has been restricted from philosophical thought or argumentation more broadly, e.g., continental philosophy, phenomenology, eastern philosophy, etc.<sup>45</sup> As an aside, something similar could be said regarding the restriction of T in AT

40. Indirectly, a similar relationship is indicated by Wood (2021, 4, 297) via the three groups of interlocutors he addresses with his latest book on analytic theology and the academy. Mapping Wood’s groups on our spectrum results in the following: (1) academic theologians, (2) analytic theologians and philosophers of religion, and (3) scholars of religion. Not coincidentally, these groups naturally align with T, PT–PR, R. This is evidence of how AT is intuitively located within the stream of neighboring disciplines. Wood has indirectly designated AT at the center of his three groups of interlocutors where PT naturally resides on the above spectrum.

41. See also Crisp (2009b, 38–39).

42. Oliver Crisp (2012, 181), for good reason, has stated that AT does not merely amount to “theologians’ writ[ing] more clearly and concisely.”

43. A point might be made here in respect to Wood’s (2021, 8, 10, 19) usage of the descriptor “analytic philosophical theology” to capture the philosophical component of AT. This supports the fact that AT could be practiced without P or at least minimally in such a way that if not explicitly stated, as Wood felt impressed to do, P might not be obviously factored in AT. Again, this supports my view that PT is an appropriate designation for AT such that it includes both components of T and P.

44. This would contradict Wood’s (2021, 11, 296–97) view that analytic theologians are philosophically trained. While I agree that this ought to be the case as much as possible, in practice it is doubtful that all those working in AT are trained philosophers.

45. For the difficulty with distinguishing analytic philosophy from continental philosophy in respect to AT, see Wood (2021, 48–51). See also Coakley (2013, 603–06). For the possibility of a phenomenological AT, see Steven Nemes (2022).

as systematic theology, such that depending on one's view or practice of ST, more space might be made for other theologies, e.g., biblical theology or spiritual theology.<sup>46</sup> Thus, by using the category descriptor PT, essential space is carved out for *P* in T and the boundary of A in relation to P is loosened, and therefore the scope of AT can expand.

Lastly, and perhaps more critical to the discipline is the relationship that PT has to PR. Here, it is unclear on our spectrum what relationship AT has to PR. But, PT has a definite relationship. This is critical and unique. PT and PR share the most overlap with P between the disciplines. This overlap has pros and cons. One positive is that PT can draw from T–P across the spectrum in a fairly consistent and coherent manner. Likewise, PT has the potential to inform T–P across the spectrum. This is all great, and perhaps AT could do the same if accepted by PR and P.

More critical however, are the negatives, or differences that PT has to PR. These differences often correspond to scope of interests and particularly terms and usages. For example, PR makes arguments for God's existence grounded in possibility. "God," in this sense, is an abstract concept or entity with attributes or properties that could possibly exist in some world. As far as PR or P is concerned this is significant and perhaps sufficient. However, this is where PT and PR differ. PT is not as concerned with abstract arguments for the possibility of God as it is with a concrete understanding of God, such as will cohere with the God revealed in Scripture by T.<sup>47</sup> In this sense then, PT does not enter into PR without T informing PT. PR, however, may very well, and indeed often does, operate independent of T. Similarly, PR might argue for dualism given a first-person perspective grounded in consciousness or the mind. Within PR or P this is great; PT, however, is going to question what is meant by a mind? Is a mind a soul? If so, what else is entailed in or by a soul? For example, what relation(s) do souls have to bodies: can souls exist disembodied? do souls resurrect with bodies? etc. Hence, given PT and PR overlap there can be ambiguity, even incoherence between terms and usages. Sometimes these differences can strengthen dialogue and clarify meaning between PT–P but they can also erode understanding in PT–T. Thus, by identifying philosophical theology as a unique discipline on a spectrum between T and P, I am convinced that

46. McCall (2015, 55–81), for example, includes the role of biblical theology in his discussion of AT.

47. Here, I am making a similar point as Crisp when he refers to the "abstract questions of philosophers and the concrete matters of theology," or his metaphysical concern that "theologians ought to be realists about the world" (2012, 176, 181–82).

the results will offer the greatest benefit and the least room for misunderstanding within PT (and AT) and among neighboring disciplines. Inner dialogue will also be fostered which is only a positive across the spectrum.

In comparison with PT then, whether “analytic theology” is a better descriptor as Wood (2014, 45) suggests, is up for grabs. Indeed, it is “more specific” (Wood 2021, 8), perhaps too specific, as it were, for some (Coakley 2013). Thus, Coakley’s (2013, 602–03) observance that “it would seem more profitable ... to speak of us analytic theologians as a “family resemblance” group who share some, but not all, of a range of overlapping and related goals and aspirations” is fair.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Crisp’s (2017, 164) qualifying of AT not as a “bounded group” with closed and patrolled borders, but as a “centered group” with greater and lesser integration of members “at the heart of the movement,” is welcomed.

Therefore, in conclusion, several benefits of viewing the task of AT on a spectrum as PT follow: first, PT clearly accounts for its dual sources of truth and it provides a clearer identification than ST in respect to neighboring disciplines. Second, as the heart of the disciplines, PT’s overlap makes the sharing of knowledge and discourse among disciplines more fluid. Third, PT can validate the unique contributions of each discipline while acknowledging its interdisciplinary mode of inquiry with its own body of knowledge otherwise unattainable. Finally, the conceptual space that PT occupies is shared by both philosophers and theologians and entails a relationship that is more symbiotic than rigid. For these reasons, philosophical theology remains to be an appropriate domain for analytic theologians and welcomes those Christian philosophers who find themselves working side by side with Christian theologians or somewhere along the road between Athens and Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

48. In fact, Coakley (2013, 606–08) self-identifies as a philosopher of religion engaged in philosophical theology.

49. Wood states that analytic theology carries on the same form of theology practiced by the patristic and scholastic thinkers engaging faith seeking understanding. This suggests that AT is PT or minimally a species of PT. He further states that there is currently no sharp distinction between AT and PT. This is further evidenced by his descriptor “analytic philosophical theology” (2021, 8, 10, 19, 59, 289–90).

Nemes (2022, 215, n. 1) cites a reviewer’s suggestion that AT is nothing other than PT; Nemes’ response argues in the negative. While I would agree with Nemes’ qualification, such that the reviewer’s examples, on my view, would locate within PR, I have demarcated AT to PT for other reasons, as should be clear from the starting points in section I (see: n. 12). A spectrum like that above, however, might aid in the clarification of views of AT and PT in examples like that cited by Nemes.

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