

The Responsibility of Theology for the Question of God

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1 In at least two ways it can be sensible to ask about the responsibility of theology for something or other, not just the responsibility of individual theologians. They are rather like the ways in which we can ask about the responsibility of the engineering behind some dam, say, not just that of the individual engineers, for the safety of the dam. In one, we may ask about something in the abstract nature of engineering, its concepts or principles: Was it reliance on some daring new engineering concept that was responsible for the dam's failure? In the other way, we may ask about the received practices of engineers generally, not just about the actual practice of the engineers involved on that occasion. Do they tend, for example, to double the theoretically necessary thickness of certain structural components, and is that practice responsible for their structures withstanding more than their due of wild weather and erratic maintenance? Or do they tend to pare things down to the point where only near-perfect workmanship and near-ideal materials can keep things safe?

I consider both kinds of question. But a recurring concern is one the President asked me to keep in mind, when inviting me to speak to the topic: the concern that there may be a 'modern culture... in which the God-question is vitiated often right from the start in the way in which it is posed'. I distrust the expression 'God-question', but very strongly share the concern. At the philosophers' ends of theology especially—from which I take my chief examples—questions calling for reference to God are indeed often skewed from the outset by the perspectives within which they are raised: perspectives attractive for good reasons, and harder to avoid than you might think.

2 By 'the question of God' we could mean many things. Often, it is a question of access, by prayer or reasoning. I focus today on the question of just how 'God', 'the divine nature' and so on, can coherently be used by theologians, whether in serious worship, or in professedly explanatory discourse. In particular, just how is it that theologians are claiming things to be, or not be, when saying that God exists, or that the world is ordered by him, or that he is Father of Israel, all-merciful, or whatever. For unless we can be clear about what the metaphysical claims are, that are being made, we are not going to know whether they even can be made to stand up. And

if they cannot at least in principle be made to stand up, there is no point in worrying about access, whether in theology or through religion. At best it would be a waste of time. At best, for in addition it could be a cruel deception.

First, a crude, provisional map of ostensibly competing views of what ‘God’, ‘the divine nature’ and some related expressions should be understood to stand for: in serious worship, as in praying, blessing, cursing...; or in professedly explanatory theology, as in ‘ordered by God’, ‘loved by God’, ‘predestined by God’, ‘commanded by God’... I represent the views in ideal types, since my topic is the responsibility of theology, not individual theologians. In practice, individuals are often led by a muddle of conflicting views and feelings. Even individual churches, in conciliar or confessional statements, tend to keep close to a rhetoric of devotion—as from liturgy or Scriptures—rather than to a bare, metaphysical rhetoric. They thus leave much room for interpretation, and at least some room for delusion and bad faith.

I compare the views only on two discriminating characteristics. Do they include the supposition that something strictly infinite exists, or not? Do they necessarily involve engagement of some kind in religion or theological explanation, or not? I do not exclude from the outset the possibility of having religious views without having theological ones, but it is convenient to take them together on the map.

See Map

In the north-western sector are views implying both that something strictly infinite exists, and that it ought to be worshipped (or, is what is being referred to in putatively explanatory uses of ‘ordered by God’, ‘loved by God’ and the like). This includes not only

- 1 Trinitarian doctrines in their full-blown, post-Nicene rhetoric, but also
- 2 Doctrines of earlier Christians, of the New Testament itself, and for that matter
- 3 Doctrines spelling out implications of certain Jewish doctrines too, whether expressed in trinitarian, binitarian, or certain other rhetorics.¹

I do not claim that the earlier doctrines strictly entail the full-blown, Nicene ones; or even that Jews or early Christians would always have been prepared to draw the relevant inferences. I do think that if the Nicene doctrines are true, the earlier ones in question cannot be false; but am not totally sure that I should be speaking of different doctrines, rather than an essentially Trinitarian doctrine—as post-Nicene Christians could hardly but see it—in different rhetorics: first binitarian, for example, then full-bloodedly trinitarian.

Map of competing positions on what 'God', 'the divine nature' etc. should be held to stand for; indicating typical holders of the positions. "North" is at the top.

SIMPLY EXISTENT i.e. STRICTLY INFINITE	NOT
<p>[Due] OBJECT of CULT, or implied/supposed Referent for Theol Explanations</p> <p>CHRISTIANS, 1/ Pre-Nicene rhetoric 2/ Post-Nicene rhetoric</p> <p>JEWS</p> <p>MOSLEMS ?</p> <p>[=Existence-theists who 1/worship, or 2/advance theol. explanations]</p>	<p>Lockean unitarians</p> <p>some Moslems say Moslems</p> <p>R. Swinburne et al. say: Christians</p> <p>religious polytheists, 'fetishists' in 19th cent. usage</p> <p>[=Character-theists who 1/worship, or 2/advance theol. explanations]</p>
<p>NOT</p> <p>a) "There is a simply existent, but I will not serve."</p> <p>b) "There is a simply existent, but I do not rely on its existence, for any theol. explanation."</p> <p>[= non-religious, or non-theologising existence-theists]</p>	<p>1/ Thoroughgoing atheists e.g. ancient atomists, Hobbes</p> <p>2/ "There is no God, but if there were, it would be determinate."</p> <p>[=non-religious polytheists]</p>

In the north-western sector too are to be located

4/ Any metaphysical doctrines held, by philosophers prepared in addition to engage in either serious worship, or theological explanation. An example might be the kind of view expounded by Aquinas in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, or in his Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, where—to meet his dialectical adversaries on a “neutral” ground, rather than one with an in-built Christian slant?—he often seemed to avoid narrowly Trinitarian, or even narrowly theological modes of expression². We need not confound this with positions ensuing from someone’s decision knowingly to repudiate full-blooded Trinitarian formulations, while continuing to profess, say, the binitarian formulas of earlier times, whether the latter remain legitimate on their own, or not.³

5/ With its high doctrine of providence and emphasis on a day of judgment, Islam evidently presupposes an ultimately ordered universe, and hence the existence of something strictly infinite. (An ultimately ordered universe cannot be guaranteed, if nothing exists but determinate entities; or if the determinate entities depend necessarily on something strictly infinite, as indeed the case would be, were there a mere sum of things.) And ordinary worshippers, not only within Islam, but within Judaism and Christianity, would often seem to take it for granted that they worship the same God. Yet some educated Moslems, particularly when discussing what they take to be Christian doctrine on the Incarnation, would seem then to favour a doctrine on God that is suspiciously close to Lockean unitarianism. The question mark on the map recognises both that doubt, and the open question of perhaps many other views not considered here.

6/ We may also list here Christian theologians fairly generally, up to early modern times, who maintained—as their official view at least—a rigorously negative view on the divine nature. Even Hume’s character Demea, himself the carrier of such a view (with one or two wobbles) is made to quote Malebranche in support of the (historically sound) contention that this kind of view had been typical in ‘all the Divines almost, from the Foundation of Christianity’ (*Dialogues...*, Pt 2, ed. Price 1976, 159), at least up to the days of Locke, Clarke, and the Deists *en titre*.

7/ If the perpetual revolutions of Aristotle’s spheres are indeed ultimately ordered, not merely perceived as ordered, while being in fact no more than an inevitably produced phase within the indefinitely recurring inevitabilities attributable to the blind necessity to be expected within an ultimate sum of things, then Aristotle, whether he would make the inference or not, is implying the existence of something strictly infinite. Aristotle does not appear to commend religious worship of any simply existent, and does not commend worship of civic, household and other traditional deities. It is his metaphysical views which invite location in the south-western sector.

Avicenna accepts the same ordered perpetuities, but attributing them non-necessarily to God. His metaphysical views are thus to be located in the north-western sector.

Philosophers' views generally have to be inferred in such ways from their views on the world around us: is it to be seen as ultimately no more than a sum of things (as in Hobbes, or the ancient atomists), or is it ultimately an ordered totality, an *universitas rerum* in more than just its name?

A general, further difficulty attends locating views on God, or on things generally, professed by philosophers who insist on some necessarily subjective element in their assertions of what there is, and who insist on that element's being determinately expressed. This would seem to include phenomenologists, and either idealists or empiricists fairly generally—if phenomena, ideas and experiences are to be in even some way determinate. Like those who would hold a “No entity without identity” position to include absolutely everything, not just everything susceptible of being investigated scientifically, would-be thoroughgoing phenomenologists, idealists or empiricists, would seem left with a choice of having only a deity in some way determinate, limited, or of accepting a less than universal ambition for the “ism” of their choice. This raises huge questions of interpretation, but even if it can be entertained as a plausible suspicion, it might go some way towards explaining why a certain reserve towards, say, Kant or phenomenology, can be noted in modern popes: even in those with apparent admiration for the methods of one or the other.

8/ Perhaps the south-western sector should also accommodate both the non-theological faithful, and those theologians who choose to compartmentalise— if that can be done without inconsistency—professing faith in a strictly infinite God, but a theology of character-theism merely.

To obviate a misunderstanding hard to avoid nowadays, since the word ‘theism’ has been pretty well kidnapped to mean, in academic circles, the position which I describe as religious character-theism, I use ‘existence-theism’ to designate western-sector views, whether religious/ theological or not⁴. Only the name is novel. The view, if I am not mistaken, is the one to be seen—in religious versions—in Justin Martyr, Aquinas and Vatican I's constitution *Dei Filius* alike.

In the north-eastern sector are views I call character-theist, for they suppose that God has at least some determinate characteristics, whether or not we can know them. In modern, academic, philosophical theology, character-theism—despite its annihilation by Hume and Kant—is endemic: often being thought the only theism there is.

Worth noting, perhaps, is that the views located in both eastern sectors, north and south, can all be described correctly as poly-theist, for they all offer a determinate answer to the question, Numerically how many Gods are

there? For Lockean unitarians and Prof. Swinburne's *Coherence of Theism*, there is determinately one. For Swinburne's *The Christian God*, if W.P. Alston has read him correctly, there are determinately three. For card-carrying atheists, there are determinately none. In western-sector views, I may recall, God is one not numerically, but in the sense of being not internally divided and not multiple. One way to imply strictly infinite existence is indeed to deny of something that it comes in any determinate quantity, or to any determinate cardinality, including nought: a denial only to be expected, it may be noted, in a rigorously negative theology on the divine nature. If character-theists, by contrast, are indeed contending that God, if there is any, has at least some determinate characteristics, whether or not we can know them, then they are precisely those poly-theists whose determinate answer to 'Numerically how many Gods are there?', is something other than nought.

3 From the above, a first couple of answers can be put to questions suggested by the topic:

Answer 1. If the theology of the theology faculties is to involve a coherent core of doctrine (cf. Aquinas's *sacra doctrina*) as well as the practice of an academic discipline, and if that core is to include quite elementary doctrine on God, then that core has, or certainly ought to have, a determining, limiting function on the ways in which theologians professing such a theology are able to raise questions concerning God.³

In which case, professedly Christian theologians cannot without inconsistency commit themselves knowingly to either substantive or methodological assumptions which would exclude from the outset even the possibility of using 'God' and the like to stand for the simply existent.

It would then seem to follow that something in the nature of theology, so understood, is responsible for how professedly Christian theologians even can raise issues concerning God. Something in the nature of such theology does determine a cut-off point beyond which they are not going to be able to allow that it is God rather than some graven image or fiction which is in question. What happens, therefore, when they step outside the limits of their *sacra doctrina*, to discuss views incompatible with it? For this is surely required in an academic discipline. Should we not then have to see them, not as theologians, but as philosophers of religion—without union cards? And in those cases where their background in serious philosophy is less secure than it could be, is it not going to be at least a danger that they may go uniquely or chiefly for positions which happen to be fashionable, being barely aware of alternatives currently out of fashion, yet susceptible of support at least as solid?

4 Very different from the theology of the theology faculties is that

'theology' which studies what there ultimately is, or is not. Already known as theology some time before Aristotle, who also called it 'primary philosophy', it is what may now be understood better as metaphysics at its most general. This does not claim to take its premisses from any special revelation, so you might think that its abstract nature should not be expected to put limitations on the way in which questions inviting reference to God are raised.

In this 'theology', however, no more than two ultimate answers are arguably available, two broad ontologies, positions on what there ultimately is, or is not.⁶ One runs,

Ontology 1. Something exists, and everything that exists exists in some or other determinate manner.

That is widely taken for granted, almost without reflection, among academic philosophers on my side of the North Sea. It is wider than the view encapsulated in the slogan 'No entity without identity', which is practically trivial, and widely taken to be a truism. What is not trivial, but highly contentious, is the further belief that it expresses all that ought to be said on what there is, without restriction to regions of things. For in a rival ontology we may say, consistently with Catholic Christianity,

Ontology 2. Something exists, and not everything that exists, exists in some or other determinate manner.

This is not nearly so widely put forward among metaphysicians nowadays. But provided we can explain how it can be put forward without incoherence, it saves both itself and its rival from triviality, while yet allowing both to be true: itself as an ontology for everything there is, without restriction; its rival, as a regional ontology for that enormous region of everything there is, that is also susceptible in principle of being an object of scientific inquiry.

Only Ontology 2, implying not everything that exists, exists in some or other determinate manner, arguably permits what there is to be ultimately ordered, rather than being a plaything of blind necessity within at most a sum of things, and a "universe" in no more than appearance. This, I think, can justify G.K.Chesterton's contention that the most immediately practical thing about someone, is his view of the world. It can also explain why journalists had no need to be surprised at the concern expressed for quite abstract metaphysics, both by Paul VI at the Aquinas Septuagenary Congress, Rome/Naples 1974, and John Paul II in late 1997.

The assertion that not everything that exists, exists in some or other determinate manner, may not be one on which most working theologians are

likely to spend much time. Yet if it is not true, it would seem impossible to have a coherent negative theology on the divine nature; or the (connected) doctrines of creation or divine providence which Christians, Jews or Moslems at any rate would seem committed to. In any case, we have enough to give a second set of answers:

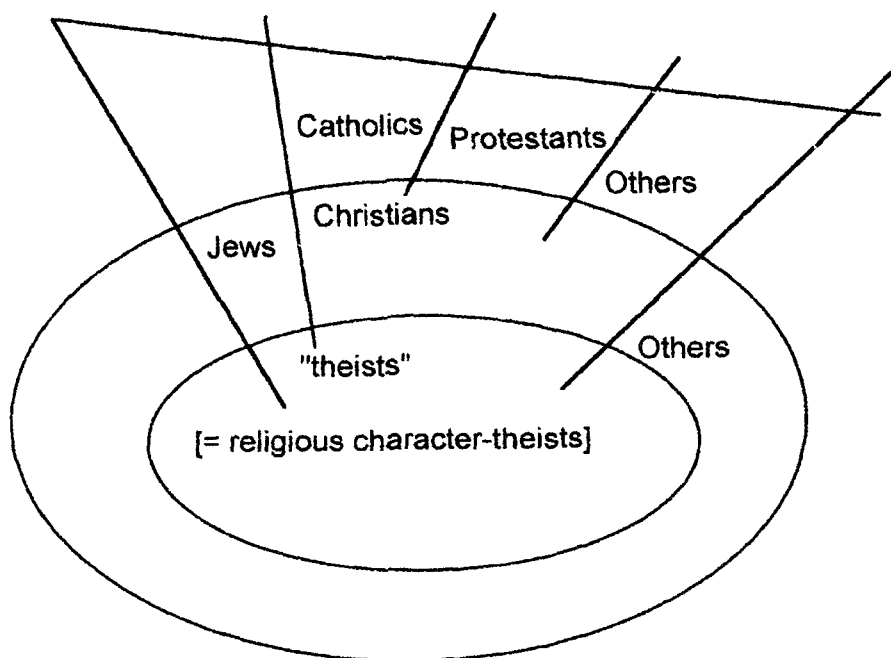
Answer 2. If we were to suppose, with at least some of those whose views are to be located in the north-eastern sector, that only things of some determinate kind can be said with truth to exist, then we would have to imagine in consequence that God will have to be a thing of some determinate kind, a thing among the things—rendering both eucharistic prayer and important domains of impetration quite fatuously pointless. If, by contrast, we may suppose that not everything which exists, exists in some or other determinate manner, then at least it is not excluded from the outset that God (as worshipped in catholic christianity) should be identified with—more properly, should not be thought distinct from—the simply existent, we may then say with truth that God is strictly infinite, whether or not we personally worship the infinite God, either in conscious communion with catholic (still lower case here) Christians, or otherwise, if that is a possibility.

The fundamental division marked on the map is between eastern and western sector views: their truth or falsehood is not something our wills can determine. Differences between northern and southern sector views—though they often appear more striking to faithful Christians, religious people, professional theologians, and post-Kantians—are less fundamental, to the precise extent that they are more in our control.

5 Answers so far concern either the theology of the theology faculties, or that ‘theology’ identical with metaphysics at its most general. In practice, matters are complicated by the hybrid discipline of ‘philosophical theology’ as typically conducted within modern arts faculties. This is exemplified in much of the work of Profs Plantinga and Swinburne, not to mention that of its critics, such as Dr Kenny and Profs Flew, Mackie and La Croix. This genre of philosophers’ theology, like that of the theologians, has a positive content (often presumed to be an extract from that of the theologians). No part of the philosophers’ content, however, is supposed privileged to the point of being regulative of what can at bottom be accepted by philosophical theologians. (This is at any rate the official view.) Yet, like the theologians’ theology, it is susceptible of being either facilitated or skewed from the outset, depending on the ultimate, metaphysical ‘theology’ presupposed in the perspective within which its problematique is addressed.

6 I now put for consideration a couple of (what I see as) examples of how the problematique may be skewed from the outset; taking them from philosophers widely respected, and for good reasons, by those engaged in academic philosophical theology. A first way of risking this, is by setting out

with the wrong map. One wrong one, in my view, is the widely used “basics-and-trim” map of reflected positions on what ‘God’ and related expressions should be thought to stand for. The idea is that all Protestants, say, are Christians, all Christians “theists”.⁷ (And, in what would seem the view of many academic theists today, that all theists are character-theists.)



One version of this can be drawn from the opening page of Prof.Swinburne’s *Coherence of Theism*:

By a theist I understand a man who believes that there is a God. By a ‘God’ he understands something like a ‘person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe’. Christians, Jews, and Muslims differ among themselves; and yet further beliefs, in which some members of each group differ from others. Christians assert, and Jews and Muslims deny, that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics assert, and Protestants deny, that Christ is ‘really’ present in the bread consecrated in the Mass. With beliefs of the later two kinds this book is not concerned. It is concerned solely with the central core of theistic belief, that God exists, that there is a God. (R.Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* 1993,1.)

This allows for a ‘central core of theistic belief’, a basic, no-frills model of

God, as it were, which philosophers at least can work on; whether or not any actual worshippers can. Christians and Moslems respectively might balk at treating say, Trinitarian doctrine or insistence on the Five Pillars as “optional extras”: though Tom Paine showed that a bare ‘theism’ could drive noble aims.

Among reasons for which professedly Christian theologians ought to find this “basics-and-trim” map of the territory to be objectionable, I mention only one: it leaves no place at all for views implying a strictly infinite God, as arguably required in quite central catholic christianity; and presupposes that the only place for Christians is as a sub-class of character-theists. Acknowledged Christian theologians from Justin Martyr to Aquinas and well beyond, have then to be lumped together with Ingersoll and Mill in the category of atheist. (As professing Christians, they can hardly count as agnostic.) As for the metaphysics of the ‘theism’ of the basics-and-trim map, it is ‘a theistic metaphysics with an almighty gap in it’, as Barry Miller pregnantly remarked of one of the more scholarly versions.⁸

7 A second way risking queering the pitch from the outset, is seen in a philosopher who would not seem committed to a “basics-and-trim” map, yet does seem resigned to using a character-theist perspective uniquely; unless his self-limitation should be seen as no more than a dialectical concession. The perspective is outlined in *The God of the Philosophers*, in which Dr Kenny sympathetically shreds a central, character-theist position. My opinion, for what it is worth, is that Kenny is essentially successful against his primary targets, but that his case would not necessarily transpose successfully against comparable positions developed within an existence-theist perspective.⁹ The perspective he accepts to work within, imposes the following:

anyone who is interested in the existence of God has to study first of all the divine attributes, for to say that God exists is to say that something has the divine attributes; and if ‘God exists’ is to be true, then the divine attributes must at least themselves be coherent and jointly compatible. The coherence of the notion of God, as possessor of the divine attributes, is a necessary, though of course not sufficient, condition for God’s existence. (A. Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers*, Oxford 1979, 5.)

First, what is wrong with that? Sufficient for now, is that it implies that God has attributes. But why is that objectionable? Do not theologians from St Paul down, routinely speak of divine attributes? They do, but... .

‘Attribute’ is used in more than one way. First, with the general, uncoded sense of the past participle *attributum*: something attributed, never mind how. In this uncoded sense Christian theologians can indeed be seen using ‘attribute’ and its equivalents up to quite modern times. William Ames’s Calvinist *Medulla...* of 1627, Bk 1 ch.6, shows as clear an account of this as any medieval’s. God’s attributes, in this usage, are anything attributed to God, in whichever ways may be appropriate.

But ‘attribute’ is also routinely used among modern philosophers in a narrower, semi-technical sense, for that which a significant predicate—most typically, a non-relational predicate—designates. Dr Kenny, not only in the passage quoted but in much of the book, is very much concerned with the narrower, semi-technical sense in which an attribute has to be in at least some way determinate.¹⁰ Using that sense, it would be literally absurd to say of a strictly infinite God (in no way determinate) that it has or is any attribute (something in at least some way determinate). So if you are going to work within the perspective outlined by Kenny—and prescribed by him for ‘anyone who is interested in the question of the existence of God’—you are going to have to exclude from the outset even the possibility of supposing God to be strictly infinite. Your favoured candidate for deity, if you can get one to satisfy your requirements, is from the outset bound to be at best some kind of thing among the things; and arguably a plaything of necessity within what is arguably going to be no more than a sum of things. Yet bizarrely, the perspective which imposes that is very widely taken for granted within academic “theism” (character-theism).

8 Turning to theology in the concrete, the body of received working practices, I find among philosophical theologians received preferences, responsible for how questions concerning God are raised, and for almost unremarked limitations on how we tend to think that they even can be raised, for academically serious discussion. And this, it seems to me, is having a knock-on effect, not only among systematic theologians, but among their historical colleagues’ readings of patristic or medieval sources.

The problem is not that the preferences are bad. Rather, they seem so generally beneficial that to pass on them, for no matter what purpose, suggests that one is betraying one’s craft, or betraying an insufficient grasp of it. One example, of a pervasive preference:

analytical philosophy is written by people to whom the basic principles of representation of propositions in quantificational form that is the language of mathematical logic are as familiar as the alphabet, however little many of them know of the technical results or even concepts of modern logical theory. In large part... they take for granted the principles of semantic analysis embodied in this notation...’ (M.Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, [London 1991], xi + 355pp., 2–3).

Prof. Dummett adds: ‘whether or not they make use of a technical vocabulary, this often renders their approach opaque to the layman’. Even more to the point here, it can blind the users themselves to the very realisation that their received notation does embody often contentious principles, limited in their application; and to so much as wondering whether any alternative is coherently possible. Now although existence-theists can in principle express their scientifically theological assumptions in quite standard quantificational notation,

they logically cannot express their supposition of a strictly infinite God in the same way. Neither perhaps can they provide in that way all the framework needed to connect that supposition with their theology, so as to show how that theology cannot be true, if the supposition should be false. This makes existence-theism harder to present tidily, but not impossible to present coherently.

Of course there can be substantive disputes between existence-theists and character-theists. There may be religious objections to worshipping a mere thing among the things. Or it may be immoral to do so. 'The man who stands in dependence on another is no longer a man at all', says Kant, 'he has lost his standing, he is nothing but the possession of another man'¹¹. We may amplify this objection against dependence on any determinate entity, however powerful or noble. But these objections logically cannot get off the ground where something strictly infinite is concerned. Only something in some way determinate can be over against us, and hence stand even possibly as a master or slave towards us. If there is something strictly infinite, it has to be *intimius me mihi*, deeper in myself than my reflecting self.

But these substantive disputes—serious enough anyway—can mask an impasse arising more elusively from philosophers' understandable fears of departing from their received (and, for important domains, tested) working practices, when such fears are conjoined with the arguably justified belief that we cannot provide a constructive, academically usable existence-theism without departing from the received working practices and assumptions at at least some important points. While this endures, questions concerning God's *opus conditionis*, conventionally the concern of the Arts faculties, can hardly but continue to risk being skewed from the outset, as by perspectives within which some kind of character-theism and some kind of atheism are the only definite answers permitted from the outset. And while that endures, it is hard to see how the theologians of the Theology faculties can expect to carry out their conventionally proper inquiries—into the *opus redemptionis*—entirely satisfactorily. Anyway, two final answers:

Third answer. Some of the working assumptions regularly taken in philosophical theology, not least on how existence-claims are to be understood, or even formulated to academically acceptable standards, do tend to exclude from the outset any question of a strictly infinite God's being said to exist.

Does this mean, however, that professedly Christian theologians have to throw up their hands, say 'So much the worse for academically acceptable standards', building themselves into an anti-intellectual lager; or else compartmentalise their faith, limiting their scientific contributions to at most modest, internal critiques of more or less fashionable versions of character-theism? I think not. In part, through a

Fourth answer to questions invited by the topic of 'Responsibility of theology for the question of God'. There is nothing in the abstract nature of philosophical theology, or in what is needed for it to be practised as an academic discipline, which requires it to exclude from the outset the possibility of supposing a strictly infinite God, or of pursuing a comprehensive Christian theology consistent with that supposition.

The materials needed for this are available if you look hard enough. So are good precedents for organising the material to this kind of purpose. But precisely how it should be done, is not part of my remit here.

- 1 From Tertullian's time theologians have commonly insisted that God's unity has to be understood so as to accommodate Trinitarian doctrine. At Prax XXXI, PL2, 194b he may be claiming innovation for the very language of Christians: "*Sic deus voluit novare sacramentum, ut nove 'unus' crederetur [deus] per Filium et Spiritum Sanctum*". If I understand him, *sacramentum* needs to carry here a sense of 'symbolic expression'. For pre-Nicene adumbrations of Trinitarian doctrine see Tertullian op. cit., PL2, 196, and Epiphanius (*Ancor 73*, PG43, 153; *Haer 74*, PG42,493, cit J.Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité des origines jusqu'au Concile de Nicée*, t.1, *Les origines*, Paris 1927, xxiv + 694pp., p.557).
- 2 See L. Moonan, *Divine Power. The medieval Power Distinction up to its adoption by Albert, Bonaventure and Aquinas*, Oxford U.P. 1994, 267–68.
- 3 Lebreton, as at n.1 above, collects the evidence for pre-Nicene indications of Trinitarian doctrine; with commentary still worth reading. A stronger thesis, on an enduring legitimacy for binitarian formulas without further development, is entertained in J.Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, [London 1983].
- 4 'Existence-theism' in the usage followed here implies:
 - 1) Something exists, and not everything which exists exists in some or other determinate manner; and
 - 2) If 'God', 'the divine nature' etc. are to be used to serious purpose in worship or even broadly scientifically explanatory discourse, they are to be used to stand for the simply existent of 1), and not for any other existent.Religious 'existence-theism' here implies in addition:
 - 3) 'God', 'the divine nature' or the like are to be used to such serious purpose.1) is a purely metaphysical position, identical with what I call Ontology 2, below. The conjunction of 1) and 2) is a position in philosophical theology; as also is the conjunction of 1), 2) and 3). See further *Infinite God: the central issue addressed by existence-theism*, forthcoming.

By 'character-theism' I understand any position in which it is implied that God has at least some determinate character, whether or not we can know anything of it. 'God' there means something like '(due, or supposed) object of worship'. "Character-theism" is thus being taken to be of its nature a religious position; in line with how modern academic "theists" most often describe their own positions.
- 5 Interestingly, academic dialects used to emphasise the two (necessary) elements differently. Catholic dialects emphasised the doctrinal element

- (‘dogmatic theology’), Protestant dialects the respectable-methods element (‘systematic theology’).
- 6 Within either broad type, there is also room for contention on what particular kinds should be thought fundamental, either universally or as objects for science. Plato’s Ideas, Empiricists’ impressions, Aristotelian (and other) substances... have all been canvassed strongly, and disputed strongly. Working scientists have not always been deterred by seeming to have to refer to “things” lacking determinateness in kind. See E.Schrödinger, ‘What is an elementary particle?’ in *Endeavour* 9(1950)109-16, cit. P.Simons, ‘Farewell to substance: a differentiated leave-taking’, in *Ratio* n.s.11(1998)235–52, 247–48.) , where Prof. Simons is concerned to argue that substances (on his understanding of these) ought not to be taken as metaphysical ultimates.
 - 7 In Shaftesbury we may read: ‘to be a settled Christian, it is necessary to be first of all a good theist’. Hume’s Philo, rejecting ‘the haughty Dogmatist, perswaded, that he can erect a compleat System of Theology by the mere help of Philosophy...’ turns this ironically, saying: ‘To be a philosophical Sceptic is, in a man of Letters, the first and most essential Step towards being a sound, believing Christian’ (*Dialogues*, ad fin., where Price at p.261 of his 1976 edn quotes Shaftesbury’s remark.
 - 8 B.Miller reviewing N.Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism...* 1997, at *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (1998) 462–63, 463. Is it important that there is an ‘almighty gap’ in the ‘theist’s” view of how things are? We are often slow to say so: ‘There is a misplaced sense of loyalty which makes many Christians feel reluctant to come out in open opposition to anything that calls itself by the same name, or uses words like “God” or “Christ”...’. (J.Wren-Lewis, cit. *Honest to God* 1963, 42, from *They became Anglicans* 168f.) At the back of “theism” itself, may there not be a misplaced loyalty to pre-reflexively absorbed sources which have no right to be taken as sources for serious doctrine? I recall a distinguished English novelist, when asked where she had found—in some conciliar or confessional source, for example—some particularly bizarre doctrine she had ascribed to Christianity, replying ‘It’s what one’s nanny tells one, when one is little’.
 - 9 For Kenny’s own estimate see *A Path from Rome* 1985, 210.
 - 10 On the narrower uses of ‘attribute’ see R.Carnap, *Introduction to Semantics*, pp.17f. in the edition published along with *Formalization of Logic* in one volume, Cambridge, Mass. 1959.
 - 11 I. Kant, ‘Von der Freyheit’, in ‘Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen uber das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen’, ed. Kants Gesammelte Werke, Berlin 1900–, vol. 20. p.94, cit. I. Berlin in *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. H.Hardy 1999, 71.Wittgenstein put it: ‘If I thought of God as another being like myself, outside myself, only infinitely more powerful, then I would regard it as my duty to defy him’ (R.Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 1984, 107-8). Yet it is said that, from his recollections of Christian instruction, he had earlier ‘received the impression that God should be “thought of as another being like [Kerr: oneself]” external to oneself and much more “powerful” ‘ (F.Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein.*, 1997, 193). If he had, this impression of Wittgenstein’s is not the most dramatic index that something was amiss in the metaphysics or ‘view of the world’ behind the Christian instruction in his school. One of his fellow-pupils was a certain Adolf Hitler.