Research Article

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Worry and Analytic Theology

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Abstract: The analytic method of theological inquiry has been around (in name) long enough to be identified by certain literary patterns. One such pattern appears in the liberal use of the term "worry." More than some trivial terminological tic, in this article, I argue that "worry" names a methodological problem, which, left unaccounted for, increases the risk that analytic theologians will, as Westerholm suggests, "[drift] further and further into constructed abstraction."

Keywords: worry, analytic theology, analytic philosophy, method

I am currently writing a monograph on the doctrine of Christ's Satisfaction. During my research, I stumbled over an interesting pattern. Among theologians, this pattern appears almost exclusively in the literary works associated with the *Analytic Theology* (AT) movement (if we can really call it a movement). At first, I dismissed the pattern as trivial, a kind of literary coincidence. When I expanded my research to other AT sources, the pattern emerged repeatedly. The pattern to which I am referring is bound up in the use – better still, abuse – of a single word: "worry."

AT has been around long enough now that various discernible patterns have emerged among its practitioners. According to Wood, this is simply a by-product of analytic theologians being "socialized" by the "shared intellectual culture" of analytic philosophical tradition.[1] In other words, the appearance of a pattern like the use of "worry" shouldn't come as a surprise. And yet, I don't think Wood's "tools and methods" explanation of what it means to be "doing analytic theology" goes quite far enough, particularly when it comes to how the pattern of worry is employed.[2] The reason why I think it doesn't go far enough is because of the penchant among analytic theologians (*especially* Protestant Evangelical ones) to treat analytic philosophers like a kind of intellectual priesthood upon whose authority they necessarily (and often greedily) rely.

Don't get me wrong, some of what Wood points to as "shared" patterns are good. Despite being a trivially agreeable virtue of "doing" either good theology or philosophy, AT's pledge to literary and rhetorical clarity[3] is a good example of a good, shared pattern.[4] The use of the word worry, by contrast, is an example of a shared pattern that is not so good. The reason I put worry in the not-so-good category is because I think worry names a

1 Wood, "Trajectories, Traditions, and Tools in Analytic Theology," 261–2.

2 Westerholm, "Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 230–54; Abraham, "Turning Philosophical Water into Theological Wine," 1.

3 According to Westerholm, "analytic thinkers formulate ever more precise definitions of particular entitles on the assumption that advances in clarity of understanding are advances in proximity to reality, and fail to notice that, in forming ever clearer definitions apart from concrete attention to the sphere of actuality, they are in fact drifting further and further into constructed abstraction" ("Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 248).

4 Westerholm cleverly and laughably – seriously, I laughed several times – topples the idea that analytics have a corner on the clarity market ("Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 235ff).

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hitherto unnamed pattern among analytic theologians who risk, as Westerholm says, "drifting further and further into constructed abstraction."[5]

Perhaps, holding out hope that "in contemporary Western culture the English-speaking, analytic tradition in philosophy holds out the *most promise* as a suitable partner for theology in the crucial jobs of strengthening the doctrinal backbone of theology and *restoring a culture of truth*," analytic worry-users appear to have overlooked the fact that, according to Holy Scripture, worry is invariably described as a vice.[6] Does not Christ repeatedly command his disciples *not* to worry (e.g. Matthew 14.27)? Does not the Apostle Peter command Christians to be prepared to defend reasons for the *hope* (not the *worries*) they have (1 Peter 3.15)? Alas, neither Peter's nor Christ's commands have induced analytics to stop treating worry like a virtue.

This is not a inconsiderable problem, especially among evangelicals, when seen in the light of how much influence AT has had in recent years.[7] For, the more analytics treat worry like a virtue (giving up reasons to hope for reasons to worry), the more they risk abusing themselves and others with the very divine gift of intelligence with which they've been endowed. And how is that, you ask? As we shall see in what follows, they risk abusing themselves and others by worrying themselves and others into a "constructive" theological corner, careful only to be "[moved] in the direction of accepting certain propositions," as van Inwagen says, "*without* taking [them] all the way to *acceptance*."[8] Or to put it more bluntly, they risk worrying themselves (and others) out of *de fide* theological commitments.

Analytic worry is a risk of which no one has yet accounted. As a kind of check to this risk, this article is intended to invite analytic theologians, and their evangelical aspirants in particular, to some methodological introspection. Before I begin distinguishing options that might explain all this worry, I should first consider some of the promise of AT. For there is, indeed, some promise.

1 The Promise of Analytic Theology

The flowering of the analytic theological method over the last decade or so has assured many that AT is "no longer a research program that needs to apologize for itself. It does not need to provide its *bona fides* as a properly theological approach to doing theology – as opposed to a kind of ersatz or *faux*-theology."[9] This is a pretty bold assertion. For, if "apologize for itself" means that AT is beyond contestation, criticism, or critique, then this assertion is, to my mind, as unreasonable as it is unreasoning, particularly for a program that been around, at least in name, for little more than a decade. But if "apologize for itself" simply means that AT doesn't have to elbow its way onto the theological table anymore – which is probably the meaning intended – I would agree, and there's at least one good reason why.

One good reason why AT doesn't have to fight for legitimacy – the one reason I am largely optimistic about when it comes to human rational capabilities when theologizing "analytically" – is bound up in the systematic nature of the discipline. I am not hereby saying that analytic theology *is* systematic theology. I am simply saying that analytics tend to be more systematic in their contemplative labours. To my mind, this is the chief promise of AT: to pull systematic reasoning back into what is a grossly un-systematic conversation, especially among evangelicals. If AT as a "movement" only ever succeeds at delivering a lethal blow to the systematic laziness that pervades most academic theology these days, its appearance on the theological scene, however long or short, will have been worth it.

Analytic theologians are remarkably good, often exceedingly *better* than most contemporary academic theologians, at seeing the logical, inferential, and/or conceptual implications of a variety of ideas, and we are in

5 Westerholm, "Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 248.

6 Reno, "Theology's Captivity" (emphasis added); located at: https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/04/theologys-continental-captivity (accessed at 2/23/2024).

7 I say this, conscious that the rapid growth of AT may have recently hit a something of a funding roadblock: https://dailynous.com/2023/07/17/future-of-templeton-philosophy-funding-uncertain/.

8 Van Inwagen, "Materialism and the Psychological-Continuity Account of Personal Identity," 309 (emphasis added).

9 Crisp et al., *The Nature and Promise of Analytic Theology*, 67.

dire need of such seeing. For this reason, I am generally positive about analytic theology when it is understood in terms of more medieval/post-Reformation scholastic-like thinking. I can *almost* see *a way* that analytic theology is a *species* of historic systematic theology.[10] I say that I can *almost* see a way because I am hoping Wood's assertion that AT, "*may be evolving* into a distinctive school of Christian theology"[11] will emerge, galvanized into what Crisp once referred to a long time ago as, "a legitimate successor to a scholastic or Reformed Orthodox approach" to the art of theologizing).[12] In its present state, I would say AT is anything but "a legitimate successor" to either the "scholastic or Reformed Orthodox approach," in part because of all their worrying. Couched purposely in a pallid example that an analytic friend provided me, here's what I mean.

Imagine an analytic theologian hears a proposal C while attending a paper at some national theology conference. Sitting quietly and listening intently, as most analytics often do, he puts proposal C into his mental meat-grinder – that is, his mind, in case you're not following – awaiting the time for Q&A. Respectfully raising his hand, he is called upon and responds specifically to proposal C by saying something to the presenter like:

> Well done. You've presented an interesting paper. Truly. You've got me thinking about a great many things. Specifically, I am quite curious how you think you can get C from claims A + B. You see, you may not have realized that if you end up getting claim C and from there you think you can add claim D, which we all agree is pretty crucial, you might end up with claim E, and I don't think you want E because E is bad, and it *might* well entail claims F and G. So, while your proposal C is interesting to me and while you've given a compelling argument for it, there are a few *worries* that you ought to consider.

Get the picture? This sort of interchange is not uncommon when practitioners of AT are involved. I am not overstating the fact that they eat this kind of thing right up, both rhetorically and literarily. It's precisely this kind of systematic energy – what analytics sometimes refer to as scholastic-like rigor – that many other contemporary academic theologians are in so much need of, provided that same energy doesn't devolve into worry.

I am conscious that in such a context, it might be considered a sign of intellectual humility for conferees to frame their interactions in terms of worries. Few people possess an encyclopaedic knowledge wherewith to satisfactorily field or respond to tough questions. To make use of worries in the context of literary work seems more like a symptom of contemporary academic life. For those who are impelled to keep the almost vicious cycle of academic discussion "moving forward" at the rate the academy expects, "worries" make for a convenient alternative to actual objections.

So, despite the promise of AT, I have my doubts about its longevity. This is because for all the virtue of thinking systematically, they appear to worry about everything. As the analytic theologian in the preceding example is taking aim at claims that are merely potential, this challenge to the hypothetical conferee's paper only amounts to a mere worry – a kind of: claims E, F, and G are worries *if* you head down the A + B = C road. This, again, is because the deduction of claims E, F, and G from proposition C has not *actually* occurred. *Had* these worries occurred, they might have arisen to the status of a legitimate objection. Again, analytics are great at this sort of reasoning. But the more I read analytics, the more I see that their reasoning often ends in worry. I'll return to this in more detail later in the article when I distinguish between what I call *owned* and *unowned* objections/worries.

2 There's Nothing "There" There?

One AT referee whom I both know and trust assured me that I was making a mountain out of a molehill by asserting that "worry" is a literary tic exclusive to the analytic movement and what is more, that this tic points to some underlying problem, exclusive to analytics. Another referee – one of more recent acquaintances –

10 Abraham, "Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology," 54–69 (emphasis added).

11 Wood, "Trajectories, Traditions, and Tools in Analytic Theology," 25 (emphasis added).

12 Crisp, http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.com/2010/05/interview-with-oliver-crisp.html.

assured me that there was nothing "there" there when it comes to the appearance of worry among analytic theologians. He worried that I had overstated the case (pun intended), and what is more, that I had undertaken a fool's errand, I decided to dig in a bit further before I conceded. This took the practical form of some simple statistical analysis.

I began by tabulating the occurrence(s) of the word worry from select works of various analytic theologians. I then compared the appearance of worry among academic theologians at large. Among analytic theologians, I consulted two sources. First, I consulted the nine issues (sans the Book Review section) of the open-access *Journal of Analytic Theology* (*JAT*). Interestingly, the term worry is purposively invoked a whopping two hundred and twenty times across the then nine issues of the journal, between 2013 and 2022. As one might suspect, worry was signally absent from *some* of these articles, while others contained as many as ten or twelve and one case, eighteen usages (in one article!). It is worth noting that this excludes ten instances of the appearance of worry where the term was not assigned to a particular problem for which the article endeavoured to discover a solution.

I then took the *Oxford Series in Analytic Theology* (*OSAT*) and examined each of its seventeen volumes for the appearance of worry. This too was illuminating. However, it is worth mentioning that I consulted these works in order to benchmark *JAT*. That is, I wanted to see how analytics use worry across their suite of publications. Peer-reviewed journal articles are, after all, the best representative of the cutting edge of research and trends within a particular discipline. So, in terms of the *OSAT*, the term worry appeared in every volume, on average, nineteen times. The volume with the least usage of the term *worry* amounted to four, whereas the volume with the most usage totalled surprising four-eight instances! Ironically, this work was composed by the same referee who told me there was "nothing 'there' there" when it comes to worry. Overall, in the then seventeen volumes of *OSAT*, the term worry appeared an astonishing three hundred twenty-one times! This was a lot of worry by my estimation, and it told me that I was on to something, despite nay-saying referees. That said, the best way to truly determine whether its usage among analytics is cause for writing an article such as this one is to benchmark its use against other groups.

For benchmarking purposes, I chose the recently popular *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* (*JBTS*). I chose this periodical for three reasons. First, because like *JAT*, it is an open-access journal. Second, I chose it because its contributors represent a broad swath of academic theologians. Third, because, in terms of overall production, *JBTS* had then produced a similar amount of content as *JAT*, despite being launched roughly three years later in 2016. Combining through *JBTS*, here's what I found.

In all, there were twenty-five appearances of the term worry across all the then nine issues of the journal (again, sans the Book Review section). Four of these usages were employed to discuss actual mental states, like fear, rather than a theoretical problem in need of solving. Five were in the book review section of the journal and were, in a comical twist, reviews that were all written by self-described analytics. Excluding these, as I had with my investigation of *JAT*, left a mere sixteen usages (compared to the two hundred-twenty of *JAT*). And as with the book reviews, each of the sixteen usages of worry appear in an article whose author identifies themselves as analytic or who has published content of one kind or another in work attributed to the analytic theological movement.

At this point, you might be thinking that this isn't even an apples-to-apples comparison – academic theologians at large don't do theology like analytics. Anticipating this objection, I also investigated a journal that's a little closer to home for the analytic theologians, namely, one where analytic philosophers publish their work, using what analytic theologians regard as their *compétence similaire* (i.e. "tools and methods"). The journal to which I referred is the University of Michigan's open access (and eminently navigable), *Ergo*. Searching the term worry across all one hundred twenty-one articles, dating back to 2014, I found that the term worry appears a staggering four hundred-fifty times! But for a handful of these four hundred-fifty usages, the overwhelming majority of these instances of worry were tied tightly to a specific problem, the author's intent was to locate and propose some kind of solution. How's that for apples-to-apples?

What I have laboured to demonstrate with this worry-word study is simply that worry and analytics go hand and glove and that the analytic philosophical and theological methods are set squarely upon the same footing. The obviousness of this second claim is not lost on me, of course. AT makes so much of this fact that some might argue that I wasted my time combing through all these sources to prove something that's self-

evident. I don't think so. If anything, this exercise has galvanized my sense that analytic theologians are far more worried than the sum of all other theologians at work today and that no one has yet explained why. And with that, let's now consider four explanatory options.

3 Distinguishing Worries: Four Options

Another piece of friendly analytic-referee advice cautioned me that by publishing a critique of analytic uses of worry, I would risk kicking a hornet's nest. This may be true. If it is, it will be so because of its reception, not its delivery. To make it near-abusively clear that kicking a hornet's nest is not my aim, I am (mildly) compelled to disclose that my endeavour to invite analytics to some degree of methodological introspection unfolds throughout this article in a self-consciously satirical manner, at least it does so at the beginning.

Now, normally, you don't tell people you're satirizing something. You simply do it, anticipating that they'll pick up on it. That's the whole point of satire. And yet, readers these days are, in general, a little slower on the uptake when it comes to a bit of friendly ribbing. I think this is often true for analytics because of their tendency to see things in such a literal light, especially when they are in "full analytic mode," so to speak. What I mean "full analytic mode" is that analytics tend to get a bit pedantic about ensuring arguments are all at right angles, so to speak. (This is true of academic arguments to be sure. It is also true even in common, everyday ones, like ones with spouses or kids, say.)

In so saying, my use of satire is not to taunt hornets. Using a rhetorical strategy that is purposely provocative (at certain points), doesn't mean that it is less scholarly. I am using satire to simply bring a bit of much-needed joviality to this all-too-serious, if not at times morose, cadre of thinkers about their assumptions and method and, more to the point, the long-term impact that their assumptions and method are having on other theological disciplines by the use of worry.[13] In the words of yet another analytic referee who (surprisingly) affirmed that I proceed with writing this piece, it's time to "put your big-boy pants on," dear reader, and consider option one.

3.1 Option 1: Worrywarts, Dolphins, and Quick Stop

One possibility that explains the pattern of worry among analytics is that they are mostly a bunch of worry-warts. Seriously. This possibility cannot simply be dismissed out of hand, however effrontery it may sound. Maybe analytics gravitate to and loiter over worries of one sort or another as a matter of instinctual fear. Maybe they are like Debbie Downer, the famous *Saturday Night Live* character who parodied the happiest of circumstances with her constant commentary on this or that misfortune (i.e. worries). Or maybe analytic theologians are more like *Flipper*, the spritely dolphin from the 1960s sitcom who didn't so much go looking for trouble but was nevertheless always the first to find it and subsequently tell everyone where it was. Maybe that's how analytics come by all this worry: natural, dolphin-like curiosity. Or perhaps analytics are more like Silent Bob from the 1994 film *Clerks* whose role was cast (alongside the disgusting character, Jay) as one of a duo of do-nothings and go-nowheres that spent their time protecting their "spot" in front of the *Quick Stop*. Is this the analytic theologian – occupying a particular "spot" with nothing better to do than call attention to worries that most theological passers-by don't know or perhaps even care are there?

However possible these depictions of the character of worry might be, such comparisons aren't all that kind to those who call themselves analytic theologians. To be sure, several of my analytic referees/friends were

13 There once was a time, now long forgotten it appears, when readers would naturally pick up on satire. Jonathan Swift's, *A Modest Proposal* immediately comes to mind (Swift, *A Modest Proposal*). Unlike Swift's aristocratic readers, who knew all-too-well they were being ribbed with the proposal to eat children as a solution to poverty, readers today (lamentably) need to be told that they are reading satire for risk of causing some offense. But because there's nothing quite so motivating as a friendly poke in the mental ribs to get people thinking, I've taken the risk.

none too happy with even the satirical possibility of being labelled do-nothings and go-nowheres or anything besides. Such should remember that in this article we are thinking through and eliminating candidate options, and well, this first one is worth considering even if it means getting that option off the table; a very respectable analytic sort of move, I'd say. Sarcasm aside, these pop culture proposals, while ridiculous in one sense, are nevertheless live options on the extreme edge of a worry continuum. There are probably analytics out there somewhere who, both in personality and in practice, are simply, perpetually worried like Debbie Downer. Some may be overly excitable about locating worries, like Flipper. Some may even be do-nothings and go-nowheres like Silent Bob. Honestly, I can't say that I know analytics like this, personally. Hence, it behoves me to move a little bit further down the continuum of worry and consider other options.

Before I don't, it's worth mentioning, to my great surprise, that yet another referee (an analytic philosopher, if you must know) confirmed the aptness of these comparisons, confessing that many analytics are, in fact, quite worried and too self-important to admit it. (I still can't believe a referee would tell me that!) And this worry, so it was suggested, has a direct bearing on the argumentative posture of many analytics. You see, there's nothing so worry-inducing as being (argumentatively) laid bare by an analytic (philosopher or theologian alike) for "missing it." This motivates fellow analytics (philosophers or theologians alike) to quickly and torturously "head off" arguments "at the pass" because they are fretful to be seen as committed to something that has "bad" implications. Accordingly, it seems that analytics, maybe more than any other academic, are worried about being laid bare before their fellow analytics. The evidence for this is, perhaps, their continual efforts to point out enough worries of their own that they themselves aren't caught for "missing it." It's a dog-eat-dog world among analytics sometimes. And with that, let's consider the next option.

3.2 Option 2: Analytic Missions, Methodology-Consciousness, and Owning Worries

Perhaps analytic worry has more of an evangelistic cultural character than a pop culture one. I've already suggested that analytics treat worry as a kind of virtue. So, maybe we should think of them as missionaries, carrying the good news of rigor and clarity to those far-flung countries of Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, and even to the People's Republic of Continental Theology. Educating these "natives" about the heinousness of their lack of clarity by appeals to "worry," they offer, as a solvent, the good news of analytic theology, inducing them to be baptized, so to speak, into the enlightened AT tribe. Every salesman knows that fear (i.e. worry) sells. What a better way to convert souls to AT than to sell them worrying about everything, right? Kind of like how the contemporary Southern Baptist Missionary culture perceives itself as history's greatest torchbearers for Christ's command to go to the nations with the gospel (Matthew 28), the AT-as-missionary option helps explain, at least in part, the "I'm doing *real* theological work," self-concept that's in the minds of many (especially evangelicals) who identify themselves with AT. This self-concept is what I refer to as AT's "methodology-consciousness."

AT's methodology-consciousness is, I think, a by-product of what Wood says is a difference between doing theology "appropriately" or not.[14] That is, it's a kind of self-assured ethos of intellectual freedom that's marked by a distinctive – albeit still largely illusive – set of AT-specific assumptions: assumptions with the perceived power to topple entire systems of thought.[15] What I call "methodology-consciousness" is, I think, what Westerholm rightly says – commenting on Bentley Hart's critique of AT – is "the illusion that [AT] has purged itself of unexamined presuppositions."[16] It is this methodology-consciousness which most defines and, what is more, impels the labours of analytics-as-missionary.

14 Wood, "Trajectories, Traditions, and Tools in Analytic Theology," 260–1.

15 Westerholm rightly points out that there remains a considerable amount of ambiguity in simply defining what AT is doing from a first-principals perspective ("Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 232).

16 Westerholm, "Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 231.

AT's methodology-consciousness admits of (no less than) two kinds of worries: *owned* worries and *unowned* worries. *Owned* worries up the social stakes among analytics because there may be a genuine disagreement with premises, conclusions, or entailments. Owned worries are borderline "objections" or "critiques," or even "disagreements." *Unowned* worries – what some analytics call "*potential* worries" – have much lower social stakes, but are more popularly employed, particularly amid analytic-missionary labours. This is because the unowned worry is far more nebulous and therefore more effective when it comes to missionary soul-winning for AT.

It's worth mentioning that the unowned worry makes it additionally difficult to determine whether the analytic theologian is speaking on his own behalf or the behalf of others. Accordingly, worry may actually be a demographic feature of Millennial or Gen-Z academics that want to deflate, so to speak, any and all potential for social disagreement. We are in a rather bizarre cultural context where a person's ideas cannot be separated from their person or character. In other words, you *are* your idea. Under these conditions, it should be no surprise that even analytics might try to cover their hide by *unowning* their worries by distancing them from their intellectual convictions. After all, voicing a "potential worry" keeps people from being triggered by others if turns out to defeat your argument.

As the social stakes are different, so also is labour difference between *owned* and *unowned* worries unequal (and a bit unfair). When someone *owns* a worry, they are obliged to give several reasons to change their mind on one facet of an argument – a one-to-one exchange. But when someone drags out an *unowned* worry, then the conversation becomes a kind of one-to-one-to-who exchange. Wrestling with actual objections and not mere worries, Aquinas is a great example to help make this point.

The *Summa* is crowded with objections to Aquinas' own position. But we cannot really expect him to have found the hundreds (perhaps thousands?) of objections to be equally pervasive or potent. That is why very few of these objections are *unowned*. The vast majority of objections that Aquinas contends with are *owned* by name and citation by a patristic, medieval, or Islamic thinker with whom Aquinas can have a direct one-to-one interaction. Now, swap out objections for worries and imagine an article of the *Summa* saying: "A potential worry about proving the existence of God is that some people think that the concept of God need not include necessary existence." This is far too nebulous. For, which part would Aquinas take aim at? Is it an actual argument or is it a mere hunch or intuition (more in a moment)? Doubtless, one of the principal reasons why Aquinas is referred to as the "Angelic Doctor" is because he relentlessly lays out argument after argument in the major premise, minor premise, and conclusion form – one objection, one argument, one reply. With the rare exception, each of these arguments is *owned*.

By contrast, an owned *worry* might prompt a similarly direct response – one objection, one argument, one reply – but because the stakes of an owned *worry* are not as high as an actual objection, the AT response to that worry rises, generally, only to the level of one supplying readers with several explanatory *possibilia*.[17] The stakes of an *unowned* worry are even lower. This is because an unowned worry is far hazier – a one-to-one-to-who exchange. For a helpful example of how unowned worries appear, Tom McCall's otherwise fascinating and well-researched article, "Crucified with Christ: The *Ego* and the *Omega*," offers up a good one.[18] I am not picking on McCall. I've merely selected his piece to exemplify what I am talking about because he actually explains what he is doing with his worry.

McCall's article admits of a total of fifteen appearances of the worry, eight of which refer specifically to what he calls the "'too many persons' worry." He says, "I have presented the 'too many persons' worry as just that – a *worry*. I *do not* serve this up as a fatal objection or as a charge of heresy. But it is a worry that should, I think, really concern the proponents of [Radical Apocalyptic interpretations of Galatians 2:19-20] who *might* be attracted to the [Theory of final assumptions]."[19] Do you see the one-to-one-to-who exchange that's going on here? McCall's differentiation of worries from objections lowers the stakes similar to the hypothetical conferee

17 For a practical example of how owned worries are sometimes utilized in analytic theological literature, the reader might consult the argumentative architecture of symposia and responses thereto (see, e.g. Murphy, "The Difference Holiness Makes," 470–88).

18 McCall, "The "Crucified with Christ," 1–25.

19 Ibid., 15 (emphasis added).

from earlier in the article who points out that claims E, F, and G are worries *if* you head down the A + B = C road. *This* is what I mean by an unowned worry.

So, if AT soul-winning and missionary labour is your aim, then *unowned* worries are more likely your game. The continuum of worry doesn't stop here. So, let's consider a third option.

3.3 Option 3: The New Straw Man Argument

Rather than a missionary *modus operandi*, it's entirely possible, and I'm prone to think even more likely as far as options go, that analytic worry is a new kind of straw man argument. Maybe you're doing analytic theology if you are 1) locating – even fabricating (i.e. making one up) in some cases – a worry of one sort or another, no matter how esoteric, and 2) "discovering" a sophisticated or clever way to knock it down or get around it with resources that you've dredged up from depths of the analytic philosophical tradition. Whether it's locating or fabricating, this often amounts to little more than rebranding some version of a historic objection/problem as a worry and proposing some philosophical-theological gymnastics that at best "'move' us in the direction of accepting certain propositions *without* taking us all the way to *acceptance*."[20]

Propping up a straw man so that it can knocked down isn't the most charitable account of what analytic activities look like, I admit. But I may not be altogether off base here, not least if you understand how worry is used by first- and second-generation analytics.[21] In a consciously oversimplified way of understanding the historical significance of the early-twentieth-century American Fundamentalist movement, consider that the first generation of American fundamentalists was largely caught up in trying to answer the simple question: "what is fundamental (i.e. to the orthodox evangelical Christian faith)?" When the second generation of fundamentalists came along – here's the oversimplified bit – they grew less interested in the question, "what is fundamental?" and more preoccupied, so it appears, with answering the question: "how do I *become* a fundamentalist?"[22] Do you see the parallel?

I think some second- and maybe third-generation analytics seem to be more concerned with *becoming* an analytic theologian than they are concerned with efforts to ply the analytic tradecraft (whatever that is) for its own sake. Thus, worry looks like the second-generation's way to identify the first-generation who has the intellectual chops sufficient to be admitted into the analytic guild. While I don't think it's worth speculating who in the guild might be doing this, it's not impossible to imagine that some second-generation (and some third-generation) analytics got their start with the thought that the secret sauce recipe for whipping up some analytic theology consists of a teaspoon of clarity, a tablespoon rigor, two cups of worry, and a pinch of creativity. Mix all these up into five to seven thousand words, bake it in the "appropriate"[23] journal, and poof, you're an analytic theologian!

I am altogether conscious that this option will likely raise the blood pressure of some readers. Certainly, no analytic reader will be too thrilled by it. And yet, as far as options go, my gut tells me that this might be an explanatory step in the right direction. My gut-*check*, however, has me asking another pair of questions about this option, namely, why do first-generation analytics use worry with a degree thrift and what else besides acceptance into the guild might explain the upsurge in worry usage among second-generation analytics?

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20 Van Inwagen, "Materialism and the Psychological-Continuity Account of Personal Identity," 309 (emphasis added).

21 However much it pains me to cite it as a source of any kind of reliability, the Wikipedia article on Analytic Theology is worth thinking through (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analytic_theology#cite_ref-19). I mention it here because it contains a history of the who's-who in the AT "movement." And this who's-who is broken down into four generations of thinkers. Interestingly, what I am calling first generation, the Wikipedia article refers to as third and fourth. What I am calling second generation would likely fall into what the Wikipedia article might call a hitherto unnamed fifth generation. What the article identifies as first- and second-generations are those Christian philosophers who are no doubt regarded by the author of the entry as kind of proto-analytic theologian.

22 For more on the American fundamentalist movement, refer to the study Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

23 Wood, "Trajectories, Traditions, and Tools in Analytic Theology," 260–1.

One way to explain how first-generation analytics use worries is to think of worries as *low*-fat objections. (Strange, I know. But keep following.) Another way to describe an *owned* worry, low-fat objections are meant to cause less mental discomfort and are easier to digest for those with weaker theological constitutions. Second-generation analytics know almost intuitively that if they want to supercharge the relevance of their argument, low-fat objections are the way to go. Low-fat objections are, for the second generation, a first principle, only, they've since changed up the recipe a bit, opting more often for the *unowned* worry or the *no*-fat objection.

At some point, I think that low-fat objections were seen as a kind of limiting factor for more creative endeavours. That is, they were seen as simply *too* objective to be even potentially recognized by what used to be called an objection. *No*-fat objections are a kind of no-more-guilt, radically subjective kind of unowned worry. They certainly have more existential gravitas than low-fat objections do.

A *no*-fat worry is like imagining that somebody, somewhere, might one day resist this or that esoteric notion that you do currently, no matter how singular or whimsical it may be. That is, it's a radically subjective – dare I say imagined – kind of problem that *might* one day amount to something more significant than it does to you, today. That, and in the end, because it matters to *you* – the second-generation analytic theologian – and because it matters *now*, it might well matter to someone else, one day, in the future.

The idea that radical subjectivity might be one of the only guides for doing analytic theology in the recent past (and present) tells me how it might well be done in the future. This *New Straw Man Argument* option does well to exemplify the idea of what it looks like for analytic theologians to be "drifting further and further into constructed abstraction." The fourth explanatory option for worry is even better.

3.4 Option 4: Worry and Intuitions

David Lewis says, "our 'intuitions' are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same. Some are commonsensical, some are sophisticated; some are particular, some general; some are more firmly held, some less. *But they are all opinions*."[24] So, maybe analytic worries are simply the expression of weak intuitions; mere opinions.[25] This makes pretty good sense as far as options that explain analytic worries go. It certainly makes sense of things like thought experiments as "intuitions pumps," which analytic philosophers talk so much about. It makes even more sense in light of van Inwagen's description of intuitions as "*tendencies* that make certain beliefs attractive to us, that 'move' us in the direction of accepting certain propositions *without* taking us all the way to *acceptance*."[26] I say that van Inwagen's account of intuitions makes even more sense of worry because I think van Inwagen takes one illuminating step further than does Lewis.

Notice how van Inwagen says that, on the one hand, intuitions "move us." By this, he means, I think, that they are a trustworthy source of authority in choosing to commit oneself to this or that proposition. On the other hand, he says that intuitions "dissuade" one from committing *too* much. I don't think that van Inwagen is talking about intellectual humility here. Rather, I think it's much more likely that he's talking about intellectual fence-sitting and the worries that keep one there.

On this line of thinking, analytic uses of worry appear to be a clever way to keep the compelling side of van Inwagen's account of intuition in tension with the dissuading side of it. A by-product of this sort of intellectual fence-sitting has analytic theologians revealing something rather remarkable, namely, just how much authority they think they themselves possess to be the final arbiter of this or that truth claim. Of all the options that I have been hitherto entertained in this article, this comes closest to explaining the appearance of so much worry precisely because theologians of the analytic variety – like their philosopher-cousins – appear

24 Lewis, *Philosophical Papers: Volume I*, X.

25 Pust, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intuition/(accessed 2/23/2024).

26 Van Inwagen, "Materialism and the Psychological-Continuity Account of Personal Identity," 309 (emphasis added).

to be increasingly more comfortable being "moved" in this or that doctrinal direction, provided they need not commit.

If worries just are intuitions, and intuitions are merely opinions, then this dovetails nicely with the idea that worries are simply shape-shifting, subjective objections, like we saw with the previous option. It also explains, at least in part, why analytics are so fond of using perspectival judgements like "from above" and "from below" or my personal favourite: "thin" claims versus "thick" ones. This judgement is my favourite because if you read between the lines, claims that are labelled "thin" are often belittled for their supposed lack of substance whereas claims that are labelled "thick" are simply discarded as untrue because they are pregnant with substance – too much to commit to. If it's thin, it's trivial. If it's thick, it's false. That's ever more near the heart of how worry seems to operate among analytic theologians.[27]

All the thin-thick business emerges from a sense that such claims are often content-empty and thus not prejudiced. Don't mistake me here. I think that theologians should employ the thin-thick judgement. But they should do so only in so far as it becomes a vehicle to avoid equivocation. For example, if I simply assumed that everywhere I used the word worry throughout this article, I meant worrywart (i.e. option one), then I should have conceded that worry could be understood in multiple ways – *thinly*, as in showing-off my mental prowess sort of ways, or *thickly*, as in the logical fallacy sort of ways. In the hands of analytics, however, thin-thick designators are clever terms, often used to hide subjectivity, like the way worry does.

The notion of worries as intuitions, recalls Roderick Chisholm's account of the *Problem of the Criterion*.[28] A centuries old debate, the problem of the criterion is a first principle, epistemic problem that McCain and Rowley's helpfully reduce into two basic questions: 1) What propositions are true? and more importantly for purpose here; 2) How can we tell which propositions are true?[29] McCain frames up Chisholm's version of the problem this way:

> According to Chisholm, there are *only* three responses to the Problem of the Criterion: particularism, methodism, and skepticism. The particularist assumes an answer to (1) and then uses that to answer (2), whereas the methodist assumes an answer to (2) and then uses that to answer (1). The skeptic claims that you cannot answer (1) without first having an answer to (2) and you cannot answer (2) without first having an answer to (1), and so you cannot answer either. Chisholm claims that, unfortunately, regardless of which of these responses to the Problem of the Criterion we adopt we are forced to beg the question.[30]

Van Inwagen's account of intuitions as simultaneously compelling and dissuading fits conveniently against the backdrop of Chisholm's schema, particularly where his "methodist" response is concerned. For, here you can hide all manner of subjectivity. Herein lies the reason why I think worries as intuitions might help explain the analytic abuse of the term worry better than the previous three options. For, if AT has truly been "socialized" by the "shared intellectual culture" of analytic philosophical tradition, as Wood suggests, *and* if the problem of the criterion afflicts the analytic philosophical tradition to the degree that Chisholm (and others) believes that it does, *and* if this affliction has steadily decayed the basic markers of credibility that "truth" is being conveyed in much of what is being argued for among analytics, *then* it looks like analytic theologians who demur theological challenges like the doctrine of divine simplicity, to take an obvious example, may be doing so because they are privileging their own, weak intuitions over the collective voice of the tradition.[31] Of course, theologians cannot dismiss intuitions about doctrine out of hand. That should be understood. The question is how much authority analytic intuitions – individual and shared alike – are being granted for making (or recommending that others make) doctrinal decisions. To put the question a bit differently: if analytic worry-talk is learned via socialization and socialization forms group intuitions, how then do analytics know whether they are being led by the best argument as opposed to herd instinct or learned intuition? Practically speaking,

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27 I am grateful to Layne Hancock for suggesting this take on the thick-thin distinction.

28 Chisholm, *The Problem of the Criterion.*

29 McCain and Rowley, "Pick Your Poison," 125–40.

30 McKain, https://iep.utm.edu/problem-of-the-criterion/(emphasis added).

31 Wood, "Trajectories, Traditions, and Tools in Analytic Theology," 261–2. See also: Sankey, "Epistemic Relativism and the Problem of the Criterion," 562–70.

on this line of reasoning, if divine simplicity is true, then analytic worries preclude having a thick account of it because it would be false. Neither can their account be too thin – just thin enough to compel but not dissuade – or else it will be trivial.[32] Maybe this is simply the way that analytic theologians simultaneously express self-confidence *and* epistemic relativism about doctrine, similar to the way that analytic philosophers do when it comes to their opinions on, say, realism and anti-realism.

As for options that explain why analytic theologians appear to be so worried, I confess, this one is hard to beat. And with that, let me sum up.

4 Conclusion

This article is intended to provoke analytic theologians to a bit of methodological introspection. The prolific and hitherto unaccounted-for use of the word "worry" obliges them to it. I say that it obliges them to it because I think the word worry names a pattern among analytics who appear ever at risk of "drifting further and further into constructed abstraction."[33] To this end, I considered four candidate explanations for why I think this pattern of worry admits of this risk. While none of these options can be truly off the table as legitimate, I think the last option is certainly the most compelling. Sure, there might be pop cultural examples of analytic worry-users out there (option one). So too might there be examples here and there of the analytic-as-missionary with their good news of rigor and clarity (option two). Doubtless, some analytic worry amounts to locating straw men (option three). The final option, however, goes the most distance toward explaining the nature of analytic worry in terms of an over-confidence in weak intuitions that leads to a form of doctrinal fence-sitting. (This is particularly true, it's worth adding, if these analytics are "well published" or if it's a "shared" intuition amongst peers.) This doctrinal fence-sitting is a by-product, I argue, of the tokens paid to the priesthood of analytic philosophers upon whom analytic theologians so much rely, and under whose authoritative influence, many such theologians have so contentedly submitted. As far as options that explain why analytic theologians are so worried, again, this one is hard to beat. So now what?

I conclude this article with a simple plea for analytics to heed the Apostle's admonishment to give people reasons for the *hope* (not the *worries*) you have (1 Peter 3.15). Spend your literary capital on fortifying doctrine that people can hope in rather than eroding their doctrinal confidence with so much worry. Don't ignore objections, of course. I am certainly not saying that. But don't dilute objections into worries and certainly don't dawdle over them. Consider the value of objections over and against worries and factor that into your assessment of whether worries are even worth your otherwise precious and limited time – resist the academic race to the bottom. Like Aquinas, and many others, tackle what amounts to an objection in major premises, minor premises, and conclusions. Avoid majoring on so many minor worries. Turn from the dead-end that is worry and head down the long, and well-trod, scholastic road. Harmonize your method with that ancient tradition with which you already share so much in common and enjoy the privilege and thrill of thinking and writing about God and creation. Then help others in the same.

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32 I am increasingly uncertain whether the AT anti-simplicity folks are equivocating on the doctrine or simply treating it unfairly (i.e. as an unowned worry). If the latter then, of course, the trivial-true judgement doesn't fit.

33 Westerholm, "Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry," 248.

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