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Reference to an Infinite Being

Languages are complex systems. Even if we hold that most of our linguistic expressions obtain their meanings in observable, empirically determined circumstances and that only some expressions obtain their meanings by virtue of their positions within the language system alone, it is crucial that the ranges of meaningful discourse and of what can be expressed by a language are not confined to these roots. We can form meaningful statements not merely about (hitherto) empirically determined circumstances and about language itself. For example, we could discuss, in early 2011, the upcoming first speech of the pope in the German parliament and say that we like or dislike such an event for this or that reason. Although nobody has ever witnessed such an event previously, we can successfully form assertions that refer to it, predicate properties of it and, *post festum*, may turn out to be true or false.[1] We can successfully talk about events that have not yet occurred, types of events that have never been exemplified before, or even events that will never occur. (Perhaps in the last case, we would not say that we have successfully *referred* to them). What is true about events is *mutatis mutandis* also true for things. We can meaningfully discuss the first human being to run 100 meters in less than 9 seconds or the first 1000 dollar note I will ever have in my hands. However, some people doubt that by the linguistic devices we have acquired in the lowlands of mundane reality, we can refer to a being as lofty as God.

In the first part of *Warranted Christian Belief* (WCB), Alvin Plantinga addresses some prominent representatives of such doubts. My task in this paper is to present and discuss Plantinga's arguments and positions in that part. First of all, I must state that I am quite sympathetic to most of what Plantinga writes in that section of his splendid book. Hence, I cannot attempt to write a profound and incisive critique. Instead, I will offer something like a shift in perspective that might be of interest to people who do not completely embrace Plantinga's contagious enthusiasm for Christian apologetics.

Therefore, in what follows, I will perform my compulsory program of summarizing and discussing Plantinga's line of argument in the first part of WCB, and I will enrich the discussion with some considerations on the possibility of

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1 This statement does not mean that no problems of reference could possibly occur; for example, if the pope falls ill and the speech is cancelled. However, such problems do not preclude describing such utterances as cases of successful reference in the event that everything occurs as expected.

referring to God and on the role the divine predicate of infinity plays in Plantinga's first section. The reason for focusing on infinity is that this particular divine predicate is central for both some strands of negative theology, that locate divine infinity in the proximity of divine ineffability,[2] and some strands of the philosophy of religion (such as the Plantingean strand) that consider infinity primarily a positive notion that is a useful kind of shorthand for some of the classical divine attributes suggested by a perfect-being conception of God.

1 Plantinga's argument in the first part of WCB

As Plantinga notes in the very first sentence of WCB, his book is "about the intellectual or rational acceptability of Christian belief" (WCB, vii). The main question of the book is: "Is there a viable *de jure* objection to Christian belief?" (WCB, x). Plantinga's overall project in WCB is to show that a negative *de jure* attitude toward Christian belief (i.e., taking it to be unreasonable to believe what Christians believe) is either incoherent or implies a negative *de facto* attitude toward it (i.e., taking what is believed to be false or senseless). Hence, according to Plantinga's argument, continuously upholding an agnostic attitude toward the truth of Christian belief is incompatible with the denial of its rationality. Plantinga realizes this project by working out what he calls the extended Aquinas/Calvin model, an epistemological model that he takes to have strong support in Christian belief. The model postulates something like a sixth sense, the *sensus divinitatis*, a faculty by which we can know divine things. As the *sensus divinitatis* is deranged by sin, it functions properly only because of divine grace and salvation (this constitutes the *extended* version of the A/C model).

Defeaters of Christian belief notwithstanding, this argument amounts to the following sequence of conditionals: If Christian belief is true, then the extended version of the A/C model is likely to be a correct model of our faculty to form true beliefs about God. If there is such a faculty, then (given some additional conditions, such as we exercise this faculty in appropriate circumstances) those beliefs have warrant, i.e., constitute knowledge. Additionally, if Christian beliefs are warranted (i.e., are produced by a cognitive faculty whose design plan is "successfully aimed at truth", WCB, 156), then it is not irrational, unreasonable or in any other way epistemologically defective to hold them. Therefore, by a chain inference, we have the following "large conditional": IF Christian belief is true,

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2 For instance, John Hick holds this view (cf. below and WCB, 43); this view is also common in continental theology; cf. the discussions in Striet (2003).

THEN it is not irrational to hold it. Hence, by contraposition, if it were irrational to accept Christian belief (negative *de jure* attitude), then one would also have to doubt its veracity (negative *de facto* attitude).[3] One might have wished that Plantinga had also presented arguments for the antecedent of the conditional, i.e., for the truth of Christian belief. But, he holds that this would be "beyond the competence of philosophy" (WCB, 499).[4]

However, before Plantinga can begin working on his overall project, he needs to address a fundamental obstacle to it: Is the presupposed realistic interpretation of Christian belief possible at all? Is it possible and adequate to take the assertions of believers at face value? When believers say, "God made the heavens and earth", do they say that God made the heavens and earth? Do they refer to a being, God, of whom they predicate a certain property, having created the heavens and earth?

Plantinga brackets this category of questions together into one question of whether there is "any such thing as Christian belief, conceived as Christians conceive it?" (WCB, x). This question does not mean he doubts that there are Christians, i.e., people who hold Christian beliefs. It rather means whether the beliefs the Christians have can be properly called "Christian" in the sense in which Plantinga understands that term. The point is that Christians think they have beliefs about God conceived of as an ITUB (an <u>i</u>nfinite, <u>t</u>ranscendent and <u>u</u>ltimate <u>b</u>eing

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3 One may challenge Plantinga's project by suspecting it to be trivial: If Christian belief is true, then it is epistemically acceptable to hold it—simply because it is epistemically acceptable to hold a truth. However, this critique falls short of Plantinga's point. His point is that if Christian belief is true, then by virtue of the A/C model, it has warrant. Warrant is what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief. Hence, according to Plantinga, in the case of Christian belief, truth entails warrant. Such entailment is by far not trivial, because a belief to be warranted in Plantinga's sense includes that the belief is "produced by cognitive processes or faculties that are functioning properly, in a cognitive environment that is propitious for that exercise of cognitive powers, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at the production of true belief" (WCB, xi).
A critique of Plantinga's overall account has much better prospects if it challenges either Plantinga's externalist warrant conception of knowledge or his claim that Christian faith does imply the A/C model (or the likelihood of its correctness). I am not sure that a "*sensus divinitatis*" supplemented by grace has strong support from most varieties of Christian belief.
4 Cf. Swinburne (2001): "There is, however, a monumental issue which Plantinga does not discuss, and which a lot of people will consider needs discussing. This is whether Christian beliefs do have warrant (in Plantinga's sense). He has shown that they do, if they are true; so we might hope for discussion of whether they are true" (206). Plantinga replied that he takes his extended A/C model to show how Christian belief "could have warrant, justification and rationality when taken in the *basic* way" (220), and this is warrant for me, with respect to my private evidence, and not with respect to public evidence (Plantinga, 2002).

—my abbreviation). However, following Kant, some people claim that it is impossible to have beliefs about ITUBs because our concepts cannot apply to them: "Our concepts can apply only to finite beings, beings who are not transcendent in the way Christians take God to be" (WCB, x). Therefore, Christians are sometimes understood to believe something actually quite different from what they say and what they think they believe.[5] Adopting a technical term from epistemology, one might follow Plantinga in calling such a position an example of (theological) anti-realism.

As an advocate of (theological) realism, Plantinga's task in the first part of WCB is to rebut the claims of anti-realists and to disprove their arguments (insofar as they exist). In doing so, he is, as it were, *clearing the deck* for the large-scale questions of whether there is "a viable *de jure* objection to Christian belief" (x), and if there is, whether this objection implies the falsehood of Christian belief.

In anglophone and continental theology, theological realism is often rejected as naive. One reason is a certain Kantian attitude that Plantinga calls "conceptual agnosticism" (WCB, 31) according to which we cannot refer to or know anything about God, at least nothing substantial. In the first two chapters of WCB, Plantinga discusses and disproves three lines of argument to that effect: the arguments of Kant (or a Kantian), Kaufman and Hick.

1.1 On Kant

Plantinga traces conceptual agnosticism (CA) back to Immanuel Kant, "a virtual titan of philosophy" whose work, however, is marked by "grave hermeneutical difficulties" (WCB, 9) because there is no settled interpretation of his work. In

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5 There are at least two different ways to understand "believing that p". They differ according to a difference in using descriptions p of a belief of a person S in sentences of the form "S believes that p". According to the one way one should, in forming p, stick to the words/concepts S uses in describing her belief. According to this way it is necessary to conclude from S uttering "I believe in the existence of God" that S believes that God exists. According to the other way, what matters is how an observer would describe what S believes on the basis on his observations of S's behavior. According to this second way it is well possible that S utters "I believe in the existence of God" while S does not believe that God (in our sense of the term) exists but, say, that there are certain cosmic forces. In the first way, it is almost impossible to say that S believes something different from what he believes to believe. In the second way, it seems well possible. In any case, Plantinga uses "believe that" in the second way when he describes his adversaries as rational beings who hold that Christians "*think* they have beliefs about an infinite and transcendent being, but in fact they are mistaken" (in thinking to have beliefs *of this kind*; WCB, x).

particular, Kant often writes as if we can think about and refer to God but cannot obtain metaphysical knowledge of him. However, other passages of his works are much more supportive for a skeptical thesis such as CA. One particular argument, which Plantinga cites, begins from the denial of intellectual intuition as part of our faculty of knowledge. From this denial, he infers that "categories can never extend further than to the objects of experience" (WCB, 10), which is a fundamental thesis of the *Critique of Pure Reason.* If the categories are only applicable to the phenomenal realm (the realm of experience), then they are, in particular, not applicable to God, who is "a noumenon *in excelsis*" (WCB, 10).

This argument hinges on at least two elements: the relation of the phenomenal to the noumenal realm and the assumption that predication is exhausted by categorical predication. I will treat the second point further below regarding the question of the scope of logical negation, and I will focus on the first point in what follows.

Plantinga distinguishes two interpretations of Kant, the two worlds and the one world interpretation, which constitute different ways of understanding the duality of A and B in epistemically basic sentences such as "A appears to p as B". Both interpretations enable the thesis that our concepts do not apply to God.

According to the two worlds interpretation as Plantinga takes it, there exist the two worlds of "noumena" and "phenomena" (these terms are used here only approximatively). Only the world of phenomena is epistemically accessible to us. Hence, as we have no access to the world of noumena, our concepts apply only to the world of phenomena, which is somewhat of a construction of ours. Therefore, according to the two worlds interpretation, our concepts apply not to God but to our mental construction, in which case, it is almost absurd to maintain the literal claim that a God in this sense was the creator of the heavens and earth because his existence would depend on ours as he is part of our mental construction (the phenomenal world). According to Plantinga's diagnosis, the problem with this account is that the same would hold for any of our concepts, which makes both the case of God non-special and the whole interpretation ridiculous. The one world interpretation, in contrast, regards the phenomena not as a separate world besides the noumenal world but more similar to the aspect we see or the image we obtain from the real, the noumenal world.

With respect to Kant there is much disagreement among historians of philosophy. Since some important aspects of Plantinga's critique will show up in discussing the positions of Kaufman and Hick, I will not go into detail here. Suffice it to say that Plantinga's conclusion after his discussion of Kant is quite negative:

> There is really nothing in Kant to suggest that in fact we can't think or talk about God. More generally, it is exceedingly hard to see how to construct an argument—an argument for the conclusion that we cannot refer to and think about God—from materials to be found in the work of Kant (WCB, 31).

As I confessed above, I embrace the major part of Plantinga's Kant interpretation. Nevertheless, I would like to focus on one point that seems not conclusive to me. If, in the sentence "God is the creator (of heavens and earth)", someone takes "God" to refer to a mental construction (call this interpretation "anti-realist" for short), then it truly seems absurd to predicate "is the creator" of this mental construction. But my impression is that this absurdity is somehow forced onto the anti-realist interpretation. Doesn't it seem absurd mainly for the reason that the meaning of "God" is located at the anti-realist reinterpretation level while the meaning of "the creator" is taken in the realist sense? A real property such as 'being creator' is predicated of a mental construct—that is indeed absurd. Wouldn't it be a much more charitable interpretation of a Kantian standpoint to locate the predicated property (being creator) also at the anti-realist reinterpretation level, i.e. to take it too as some sort of mental construction (a mental construction that applies to certain other mental construction as their property in a very special sense)? If one does so, the absurdity is by far not that obvious. If one refuses to do so, one might call for a justification for that discrimination between two concepts so closely related as the concepts of God and creator, of whom the one is interpreted at the anti-realist reinterpretation level while the other is taken literally.

1.2 On Kaufman

In section 2.I, Plantinga discusses the position of the late Harvard theologian Gordon D. Kaufman (1925–2011), who is an adherent of CA (i.e., the thesis that we cannot think or talk about God because our concepts do not apply to him). Plantinga analyzes Kaufman's position as follows: Because God is infinite, he is not identical with any finite reality; hence, he is not within the realm of our experience; therefore, the reference of the term "God" is highly problematic. We can neither know nor experience what Kaufman calls "the real referent" of the term "God". What is available to our worship, prayer and all other practical purposes is only an imaginative construct called "the available God" or "the available referent of the term 'God'".

Plantinga criticizes Kaufman's position along two lines. The first line of critique is that he doubts both steps of the argument from God's infinity to the

problematic reference of the term "God". Let me reserve the discussion of the first step of the argument, which proceeds from infinity to not being within the realm of our experience, for the section below on infinity (Section 3). With respect to the second step, from unexperienceability to the problem of reference, Plantinga's critique focuses on entities or events postulated in the natural sciences: Despite the fact that many such entities or events, such as the Big Bang, cannot be experienced by us, no one would ever doubt that "Big Bang" is a meaningful term which can be used to form true sentences. Hence, according to Plantinga, there is no reason to support the general inference from unexperienceability to the problem of reference.

One might conjecture that this conclusion is a little too quick for, in fact, there *are* problems of reference with terms like "Big Bang". Anti-Realists in the philosophy of science, for example, claim that such terms do not refer, at least not to events in empirical reality. Structuralists, for example, will say that scientific terms refer to places in theoretical structures. According to this conjecture, then, Plantinga would need an additional argument in support of realism here.[6] It is, however, not clear that Platinga does really need it. The point of his counter-example to Kaufman's thesis is not that there are no problems of reference concerning terms like "Big Bang". The point is that unexperiencability alone is not a sufficient reason for raising doubts about the reference of a term. The "Big Bang" is indeed a counterexample to Kaufman's first conditional from unexperiencability to problems of reference.

Plantinga's second line of critique consists in revealing several points of incoherence in Kaufman's view. For example, it is incoherent to interpret a Christian believer as thinking to predicate properties of the "real" God while managing only to predicate them of a mental construction of his own. Since nobody will consciously acknowledge that it was his own mental construct that created the heavens and earth, there remain only two possibilities: Either one must suppose that the Christian is utterly wrong when he thinks that he predicates the divine properties of God, whereas he unconsciously predicates them of his mental construct; or one must suppose that not only the reference of the proper name 'God' but also the meaning of the divine predicates differ from what they are ordinarily taken to be. However, this interpretation would be so alien to the belief system interpreted that "a strong argument would be required to make this even reasonably plausible" (WCB, 37)—and there is no such argument.

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6 Cf., for example, Plantinga (1982). In that famous address Plantinga argues chiefly against anti-realism. He embraces only part of the anti-realist intuition that truth is not independent of mind—insofar as it is necessarily coextensive with God's mind.

Plantinga identifies further incoherence in the idea that "our concepts do not apply to the real referent, if indeed there is such a thing" (WCB, 38). This argument is incoherent, Plantinga states, because if a concept P does not apply to x, then x does not have the property expressed by P (the property P, abbreviated); thus, x has the property non-P, and thus we *can* attribute a property to God, after all. Furthermore, the argument is self-refuting in the case of formal properties such as being self-identical. If the predicate 'is self-identical' does not apply to the real referent, then 'is not self-identical' does. Additionally, the same is true for any property of which we have a concept, implying in consequence that "there could be a being that had no properties, didn't exist, wasn't self-identical, wasn't either a material object or an immaterial object, and didn't have any properties" (WCB, 38). Such a position is clearly incoherent, Plantinga concludes.

In his later works, Kaufman changed his position somewhat. He abandoned the real referent and focused more strongly on opposing the reification of God—an opposition that is very common among continental theologians today. "It is a mistake", Plantinga quotes Kaufman,

> to regard qualities attributed to God [...] as though they were features or activities of such a particular being. [...] These terms and concepts do not refer directly to 'objects' or 'realities' or their qualities and relations, but function rather as the building blocks or reference points which articulate the theistic world-picture or vision of life (WCB, 39).

This argument explains why Kaufman presents an elaborate reinterpretation of central theistic and Christian doctrines. Religious language and practice are still important insofar as they are "used to promote human flourishing, 'human fulfillment and meaning'", as Plantinga quotes Kaufman (WCB, 40).

Plantinga's critique of Kaufman's new position is biting: Kaufman needs the reinterpretation of God as a symbol because he thinks that there is no such being (a God in the sense of ordinary Christian belief). Hence, he is an atheist-theologian—a type of person whom Plantinga analogizes to a mountaineer skeptical about the existence of mountains. Insofar as Kaufman advises us to continue to use the term 'God' and other traditional phrases, even though there is no being such as the traditional God who has the properties traditionally predicated of him, he wants to assign those terms quite a different meaning: "We are to say such things as 'God is real', meaning that in fact there are forces in the world that contribute to human flourishing" (WCB, 42). In Plantinga's view, this is misleading double-talk:

> It is not even a matter of throwing out the baby with the bathwater; it is, instead, throwing out the baby and keeping the tepid bathwater, at best a bland, unappetizing potion that is neither hot nor cold and at worst a nauseating brew, fit for neither man nor beast (WCB, 42).

I can understand the emotions guiding such polemic assessment. Taken as it stands, Kaufman's position (which can be taken *pars pro toto* for ways of thinking that are prevalent in contemporary theology) is highly inadequate to the self-understanding of Christian belief. To a full-fledged traditional Christian believer, taking "God is real" to express *nothing but* that "there are forces in the world that contribute to human flourishing" must seem to be a blunt misrepresentation of some of the most central elements of her belief. However, I have the impression that Plantinga's warranted aversion against Kaufman's "devotion to the bath water" has caused Plantinga, the passionate advocate of the baby, to overlook that even the moldy Kaufmanian bath water may be of some worth if used appropriately. Let me disclose the meaning of these metaphorical terms.

What I would like to propose is a more constructive way of understanding Kaufman's claims. To be sure, in the interest of Christian faith, some of Kaufman's statements cannot be upheld, for instance, the idea that we cannot refer to God or that God (in the sense of classical theism) does not exist (if Plantinga's reconstruction of Kaufman's position is correct with respect to this point). However, other claims might be preserved. To specify these, I need to say somewhat more exactly what a reinterpretation of Christian faith is. A reinterpretation of a body of beliefs is a mapping from the set of traditional beliefs (or their verbalizations) onto a set of beliefs that the traditional verbalizations are now taken to express. For instance, "God is real", which is a verbalization of a traditional Christian belief, is mapped onto the belief that there are forces in the world that contribute to human flourishing. Suggesting theologically such a reinterpretation has two elements: first, endorsing the images of the traditional beliefs under the mapping (endorsing the belief that, for instance, there are forces in the world that...) and, second, endorsing the meta-thesis that the mapping constitutes a meaning function, i.e., a function that assigns a meaning to the beliefs in the set it operates on, viz. a meaning that is adequate to Christian belief. If one abandons this meta-thesis including all suggestions to *identify* Christian belief with its weak image under the reinterpretation function, the result will be a collection of weak images of Christian beliefs, that are well compatible with Christian belief traditionally understood. This collection can be taken as a type of secular interpretation of Christian belief. It is an "under-interpretation" as it surely falls short of what it intends to interpret. However, is it therefore worthless? The point is that according to a traditional understanding of Christian faith, "God is real", for instance, does (in connection with several other doctrines of Christian faith) well *imply* that there are "cosmic forces working toward the fully humane existence for which we long" (Kaufman's words as quoted by Plantinga), but not the converse. Another example is the fact that the worshipping practice of a Christian community does indeed "orient selves and communities so as to facil-

itate development toward loving and caring selfhood, and toward communities of openness, love, and freedom" (Kaufman according to Plantinga, WCB, 41; at least this accords to the ethical ideals of true Christian faith). A just critique of Kaufman should not assert that those claims are false. In fact, most of them are implied by Christian faith even though falling short of it. Kaufman's error does not consist in indicating and endorsing those implications (and Plantinga accordingly does not say it does). Kaufman's cardinal error is to identify implications of Christian belief with that belief itself. This is what in my eyes ultimately warrants Plantinga's rejection of Kaufman's *Ansatz*.

Thus, my proposal results in interpreting most of what Kaufman writes as a secularized extraction from Christian belief even if it falls short of an adequate interpretation of such belief. As it stands, such an extraction may be helpful for mystagogical and apologetic purposes and represents something akin to a pre- liminary stage of Christian faith for modern, rational and open-minded people. By Kaufman's work we may learn that an interpretation of Christian faith exists that, when considered in itself (i.e. without adequacy issues), makes sense, is morally appealing and in accordance with reason, touches on some deep streams of religious feelings or desires in people, and strikes some necessary chords to enable a secular-minded person to discover his "religious musicality" (Max Weber).[7]

Again, to believe that God exists is to believe *much more* than that there are "cosmic forces working toward the fully humane existence". However, belief in God implies belief in such forces, or rather, in one such force. Such belief may well serve as a preliminary stage, a first-order approximation or an educational simplification of a full theistic and Christian belief. I cannot see that this way of reading Kaufman would in any way contradict Christian faith or intellectual in- tegrity as long as one does not attempt to identify what is not identical.

1.3 On Hick

Plantinga then discusses the work of John Hick. According to the version of CA that Hick holds, our concepts—or at least our 'substantial' concepts, see below—

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[7] "I absolutely lack religious musicality and I have neither the desire not the ability to erect any mental 'constructions' of religious character within myself..., though after careful consideration, I have to say that am neither anti-religious nor irreligious". My translation; the German original reads: *"Ich bin zwar religiös absolut unmusikalisch und habe weder Bedürfnis noch Fähigkeit, ir- gendwelche seelischen 'Bauwerke' religiösen Charakters in mir zu errichten..., aber ich bin nach genauer Prüfung weder antireligiös noch irreligiös"* (Weber 1994, 65).

do not apply to God or 'The Real' as it is in itself. As our language has developed in contact with experienceable reality, it does not apply to the noumenal reality of "The Real *an sich*".

Plantinga indicates two ambiguities in Hick's position, the first one concerning the one world vs. two worlds interpretation of Kant and the question of whether the noumenal Real is experienceable and the second one concerning the strength of the CA thesis that Hick embraces. Regarding the first point, Plantinga can dismiss the ambiguity quite easily by proposing the view that

> perhaps it doesn't matter whether we say that we actually experience it [= the Real, C.T.] or say, instead, only that it contributes to our experience (WCB, 45).

Resolving the second point requires further elaboration. Although Hick admits that it makes no sense to assert that none of our concepts apply to the Real, the question is which ones do and which ones do not.

To that end, Hick draws on an elaborate distinction of types of properties or concepts.[8] He distinguishes formal from nonformal properties, negative from positive properties and properties of which we have a grasp from those of which we do not have a grasp. These distinctions are displayed in the following table.
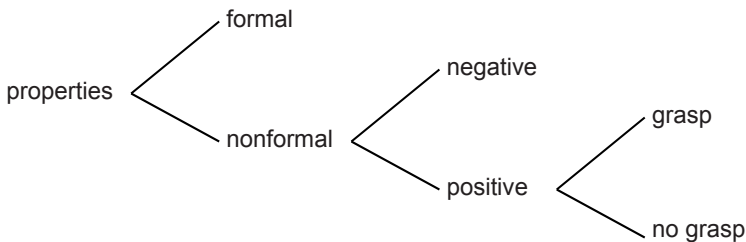
Plantinga develops the theoretical division of concepts even further. He distinguishes two groups of formal concepts: the concepts of one group are essential for a thing to have and are necessarily had by everything (such as *being self-identical* and *being such that 7+5=12*), whereas the concepts of the other group

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8 In the multi-layered relation of our language to the world, there are two different levels that are closely connected with and broadly analogous to each other: the level of concepts and the level of properties. Concepts express properties, and properties of which we have a grasp can be expressed by concepts. Hence, there is always a sort of redoubling between a theory of concepts and a theory of properties. In the following text, I will cheerfully toggle between both levels.

are of a different, more contingent, relational character (such as *being referred to by human beings* and *being thought of by John*).

According to that scheme of properties, Hick's theory can be formulated as follows: The Real has formal properties (such as having some properties, being self-identical, etc.), has all formal properties that everything has and it has some of the other formal properties. In addition, if P is a positive nonformal property of which we have a grasp, the Real does not have P (Hick's version of negative theology); therefore, the Real has the complementary negative property P^c (such as not being a horse, not being good), which exists because P was such that we have a grasp (a conception) of it (note that $P \lor P^c$ is universally valid for properties P of which we have a grasp). Furthermore, the Real can and perhaps must have some positive nonformal properties, but only such properties of which we have no grasp.

Thus, Hick's idea with respect to the Real is that only formal properties and negative properties apply to it. If we call the remaining properties 'substantial' according to Hick, we can summarize his position in his own words as

> "that our substantial concepts do not apply to the Ultimate" (WCB, 46).

According to Plantinga, Hick's theory of religious belief attributes a striking error to the practitioners of great religions: Although believers think that their beliefs refer to a being with certain positive properties of which they have a grasp, in fact they refer to the Real, a being with no positive nonformal properties of which we have a grasp. More precisely, such practitioners aim at talking about the Real *an sich* but manage to refer to the Real *für mich*, the phenomenal "version" that is available to us in contrast to the noumenal reality "*an sich*".

However, how *could* we refer to a being such as the Real that has no nonformal positive properties of which we have a grasp? Plantinga considers several possibilities. Obviously, definite descriptions using classical divine properties will not do because those are positive properties of which we have a concept (see Section 2 below for a more detailed account of this way of referring to something). Furthermore, the description "the being that has no nonformal positive properties" does not work because there might be several such beings differing from each other only in positive properties of which we have no grasp. Nonetheless, there must be some type of connection between the person referring to the Real and the Real referred to. The only remaining possibility is that there is "some kind of experiential contact" with that being (WCB, 51). However, that possibility comes at a high price for Hick's position because "then the Real enjoys at least one positive nonformal property of which we have a conception: the property *being experienced by us*" (WCB, 51). Although this property might be

considered a formal property in Hick's sense, Plantinga shows that it entails nonformal properties depending on one's theory of experience: According to the standard causal theory, *being experienced by us* entails the positive nonformal property of being causally connected with us (WCB, 52). Hence, Hick's position is incoherent as it presupposes that a being that is defined as having no nonformal property of which we have a grasp does indeed have the nonformal property of being experienced by us.

The significant error that Hick imputes to religious practitioners is a different matter. Although such imputation reduces the plausibility of his position, it does not necessarily threaten coherence because even in quite ordinary circumstances, it is possible to successfully refer to a being even though one has mostly false beliefs about that being.

Overall, Plantinga judges the coherence of Hick's position much more favorably than Kaufman's. Although we have no positive evidence that a being such as Hick's Real does exist, we cannot assert that it does not exist. To successfully refer to the Real, one must make an exception for the rule that it does not have positive properties because there must be some type of experiential contact with it. The distinction of positive and negative properties is not incoherent, although it is not completely overt. Plantinga in fact proves its coherence by constructing a basic theory of positive and negative properties and mapping it onto basic propositional logic.[9]

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9 Although there surely are positive and negative predicates, i.e., linguistic expressions of properties that either do or do not contain linguistic negation particles (such as the word "not" or the particle "un-" or the like), it is not clear that the distinction makes equally good sense with respect to properties. If one considers abstractness and concreteness, for example, it seems arbitrary which one of these properties to take as the positive, more basic property and which one as the negation of the other (either "concrete" means "not abstract" or "abstract" means "not concrete").

Plantinga's basic theory of positive and negative properties has the following axioms:

(1) Every property is either positive or negative.
(2) Every property has a complement.
(3) The complement of a property P has the opposite sense from P.
(4) A property equivalent to a given property has the same sense as that property.
(5) No negative property of which we have a conception entails a positive property of which we have a conception (otherwise the Real would have that entailed property).
(6) The Real has no positive properties of which we have a conception (perhaps there are exceptions to the generality of this axiom).

Given an appropriate definition of conjunctive and disjunctive properties, this theory of positive and negative properties can be formalized and mapped onto propositional logic so that one can understand that it is consistent, decidable, complete etc; cf. WCB, 53.

There is another problem with Hick's position, which concerns the concept of infinity; hence, this problem will be discussed in the section on infinity (Section 3 below). To anticipate a result, Hick's position leads to the conception of the Real as a being that is limited with respect to all properties of which we have a grasp simply because it does not exemplify them. The Real can be called 'unlimited' only in the sense of possessing, to the maximal degree possible, "some properties of which we have no grasp" (WCB, 55).

Hence, Hick's conception fairly passes Plantinga's tests for coherence. However, in the course of the conjunct procedure of being tested and modified, the concept of the Real becomes sharpened in a way that makes it vulnerable in the sense of religious relevance. The basic problem is, Plantinga states,

> that if the Real has no positive properties of which we have a conception, then we have no reason at all to think that it is *in religion* that human beings get in experiential contact with this being, rather than in any other human activity: war or oppression, for example. This being has none of the properties ascribed by the practitioners of most of the great religions to the beings they worship: it is not good, or loving, or concerned with human beings, or wise, or powerful; it has not created the universe, does not uphold it, and does not pay attention to the universe or the creatures it contains. It is an unknown and unknowable X (WCB, 56).

If the Real had the properties of the theistic or even the Christian God, there would be strong reasons for thinking that we "live in relation to the Real" and that "some ways of behavior are appropriate to the Real and others are not" (WCB, 57), as Christian belief considers when it holds that "self-centered behavior is less appropriate with respect to [the Real] than living a life of love" (WCB, 58). However, if it is true that the Real is emptied of all positive properties of which we have a conception and is conceived of as a mere unknowable X, the reasons for this conclusion vanish. Moreover, one cannot find any criterion for deciding which ideas in religions are *authentic* manifestations of the Real (Hick's "*personae*" and "*impersonae*", WCB, 58). Whereas Plantinga presents this last point as a question about religious relevance, one might consider emphasizing it further and taking it as another question about the coherence of an account that is indebted to the possibility of judging the authenticity of manifestations of a being that is conceptually emptied of almost all grounds for judging.

2 Elements of a theory of reference (to God)

According to the self-image of Christian belief, God (who is an ITUB) exists. He is the only ITUB and it is the case "that we are able to address him in prayer, refer to him, think and talk about him, and predicate properties of him" (WCB, 3). As far as classical theology is concerned, the last point is not unopposed. There is a strong tradition of so-called "negative" theology. Claims of different strength are offered under that label, ranging from certain epistemic restraints such as that God is not completely cognizable or that his essence is not knowable (what he is)—via restrictions of property ascription (such as that God is more unlike than like what our predicates express) to full-blown apophatic claims that come close to incoherence (such as that we can neither say nor know anything about him at all). Plantinga reconstructs all the positions we have discussed thus far as strands of negative theology, although they differ in the strength of the CA thesis they embrace.

Once the pros and cons of Kant's, Kaufmann's and Hick's positions have been discussed, the systematic questions remain: Can we refer to such a being as Christian believers think they do in prayer, praise and preaching? How could that work?

Generally, it is a fact that the (successful) use of the linguistic devices that we have acquired in empirical situations is not confined to such situations. We can refer to objects or events in empirical situations of quite a different type from the situations in which we have acquired their names (just consider the example of the papal speech given in the introduction to this paper); moreover, we can successfully discuss non-empirical objects such as numbers. Leaving aside the question of the exact ontological nature of mathematical objects, we might suppose that numbers are not part of physical reality and that we can successfully refer to the number three with the word "three". We acquire mathematical language in empirical situations, such as when we face three apples, three green cars or three family members, but then we proceed to use such language successfully in talking and thinking about abstract objects, such as numbers.

Alternatively, consider scientific theories that propose certain types of theoretical entities. Most people are usually inclined to believe a scientific theory that has explanatory and prognostic success to be true and to treat it as if it were wholly unproblematic to refer to the entities it presupposes and to predicate properties of them.[10]

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[10] However, Anti-Realists in the theory of science, such as Bas van Fraassen and others, challenge this "usual inclination".

Those examples provide the foundation for God's case. If our linguistic faculties are such that we manage to refer to such diverse types of non-experienced or non-experienceable things or events, then there is also a certain initial plausibility that such faculties will also serve for the case of God. However, God's case is somewhat special. Plantinga adduces the divine predicates of infinity, transcendence and ultimacy to illustrate this specialty. I will discuss this further in the following section on infinity (Section 3). Additionally, in most of the cases above, we use some of our ordinary terms in their ordinary meaning and combine them in definite descriptions for something non-ordinary. As, for example, when we use the terms "pope", "parliament", "speech" and a date expression, terms with whose meanings we are well acquainted, in order to refer to an event with which we are not acquainted yet.[11] This use is quite different from God's case. Most nonformal predicates used to distinguish him, such as "the all-knowing, all-powerful, and wholly good creator of the heavens and earth", are not ordinary predicates in their ordinary meaning, but their meanings are already modified. God does not perform morally good actions in the way that we do; he does not come to know things in the ways that we do; and his creating things is an "activity" of a nature that is quite different from the nature of our activities of "creating", such as building, constructing, breeding or designing.

Nevertheless, reference to God must be possible if one pursues a realistic account of religious belief that should be open to the possibility of such belief to be (literally) true. Plantinga presents a rudimentary theory of reference to God in the context of his discussion of Kaufman's *Ansatz*. Before presenting this theory, I would like to clarify another point concerning predication.

Plantinga frequently argues that it is plainly incoherent (or even self-refuting) to claim that no predication of God is possible at all. His argument is that if for a property P, God does *ex hypothesi* not have P, then he must have the complementary property P^c, which is simply the property not to have P. Although this argument is in some sense unobjectionable, a Kantian may take it to miss the point in question. To understand this, it is helpful to distinguish logical from contentual or "real" (to use a Kantian term) predication. Plantinga's argument

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11 The situation in case of the number word "three" is not that easy. We might say that by "three" we mean the number that these three apples and those three pears have in common, but this presupposes a meaningful concept of "number" that seems to be too abstract so as to be introduced by more ordinary concepts. One might think about reducing this case to forms of definition by pointing out exemplary cases, but even then there remains at least one term for quite an abstract operation, namely the instruction to form the general term that those examples are examples of. But let's not move into details of the ontology of numbers at this point.

is cogent for logical predication: If one holds that predication is impossible in the sense that for each predicate P, P does not hold for any ITUB, then predication *is* possible insofar as the opposite predicate non-P necessarily holds for the ITUB (because if P does not hold for x, x belongs to the complement of the extension of P, and that is the extension of non-P.) Thus, the impossibility of predication in the logical sense is self-refuting; therefore, predication is clearly possible.[12] Another issue is "real" or "contentual" or "categorical" predication, by which I mean the ascription of (logical) predicates of certain types, namely predicates that fall under certain distinguished categories of predicates or are composed of such predicates. Call such predicates "categorical predicates". There might thus be two reasons that a categorical predicate P does not hold for some x (i.e., there are two negations of "Px"), namely that the converse categorical predicate "non-P" holds or that the categorical predicates generally do not apply to x; therefore, neither P nor non-P holds. According to this view, non-P is not the logical contradictory to P; hence, the *tertium non datur* "for all x Px or non-Px" does not hold. (Or it holds only for x such that x is a categorizable object. This object is what is usually called a "finite object"—one for which the categories can be applied.)

Kantian philosophy is by no means the only branch of philosophy that has a problem not with broadly logical but with such a special, categorical predication. According to Aquinas, for instance, predication is the intellect's action of dividing and composing, such that it cannot work in the case of a simple being that has no parts (Aquinas STh I,13). Furthermore, according to the Aristotelian theory of predication, which Aquinas largely embraces, conceptual determination is by sorting and shelving according to a *genus proximum* and a *differentia specifica*. Hence, this type of determination does not work in the case of a being that is from the outset taken as not falling into any genus whatsoever.

In chapter 2.I of WCB, Plantinga presents some elements of a theory of reference in the context of his discussion of Kaufman's arguments for the CA thesis. He considers two ways of referring to God: via definite descriptions and via social communication. Definite descriptions such as 'the creator of heavens and

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12 Another argument for the self-refuting nature of strict apophatic theses can focus on the meta-assertion that something, s, has no properties. This argument is performatively self-refuting because it predicates the property *having no properties* of s. One may defend the claim by taking refuge in the distinction of object- and meta-level properties, restricting the negative claim to object-level properties and taking the objection to concern a meta-level property. However, this distinction would seem to considerably reduce the strength of the thesis. The distinction is perhaps even incoherent because having meta-level properties may imply having object-level properties.

the earth', 'the omnipotent and omniscient creator of the world' or 'the divine person who spoke to Abraham' pick out a referent by a property that the referent and only the referent possesses. More precisely, a definite description in natural language has the form 'the x such that … x …' where '… x …' is replaced by a predicate or a formula (i.e., a logical combination of predicates) $\phi(x)$. Since Frege and Russell first studied definite descriptions in a systematic manner, it has become clear that the successful use of them in the context of true statements requires two conditions be satisfied, an existence condition ($\exists x\ \phi(x)$) and a uniqueness condition ($\forall x,y\ (\phi(x) \wedge \phi(y) \rightarrow x=y)$). If one or both conditions are not satisfied, philosophers of language have different opinions on how to address sentences containing such "defective" definite descriptions (they consider the sentences false, senseless, devoid of meaning, forbidden or respectively ill-formed). In case the conditions are satisfied, one may introduce a new name into the language ("new" in the sense that it will obtain its meaning now) by defining it as the object selected by the description. As one may use different description formulas for that purpose, the meaning of the expression "God" for different people is fixed differently depending on what description they have chosen as basic (this is a significant problem in texts on natural theology as there are so many different "definitions" of the concept of God). Elsewhere—in "The Boethian Compromise"[13]—Plantinga has argued that different descriptions may in fact "express logically equivalent (even if epistemically inequivalent) essences of God" (WCB, 35).

Although the definite description method of fixing the reference of the term "God" is the more important one in scholarly contexts such as the philosophy of religion or theology, the more common way of fixing the reference is much simpler. This method consists in obtaining the name from others, who already use it, either during one's childhood or whenever one first encounters other people talking about God. This method amounts to a causal theory of meaning quite consistent with that of Saul Kripke: the linguistic items I use commonly obtain their meanings through my picking them up from the discourse of or with others and through my intention to use them with the same meaning as others do. This way of acquiring meaningful vocabulary is much more common, but it is also more risky. Imagine that someone has just invented a new word that in fact refers to nothing, but he begins to use it in some ways that others do not completely understand but find interesting enough to continue telling others, and so forth. Ultimately, all language use that is only obtained from others and not actively connected to one's own experiences or at least actively struc-

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13 Plantinga (1978).

tured by ordering concepts is on credit from one's linguistic predecessors. If these predecessors have just invented a meaningless word, then the whole path through generations of language users on which this theory of meaning is based may lead to a dead end. Although this aspect may be judged a slight disadvantage of the causal theory of meaning, it fits well with Plantinga's views because he indicated already in his *Warrant and Proper Function* that "the success of my noethic ventures depends on the success of similar ventures on the parts of those around me" (see ibid., 77–78; WCB, 35).

3 Infinity and the role of divine attributes

Plantinga is not known to support philosophical theology. Nevertheless, he does support the use of divine predicates as he takes Christian belief to have two subsets: classical theism (including beliefs such as the existence of an ITUB) and its subset of specifically Christian beliefs (including beliefs about trinity and salvation).

In what follows, I would like to focus on Plantinga's conception of the divine predicate 'infinity'. This predicate is of particular interest because on the one hand, it appears in all of his discussions in the first part of WCB and in the definition of an ITUB (an infinite, transcendent, ultimate being); on the other hand, it does not appear in his standard formulations of theistic belief, including the following two formulations:

> there is an all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good person (a person without a body) who has created us (WCB, 3)

and

> God is a person: that is, a being with intellect and will. A person has (or can have) knowledge and belief, but also affections, loves, and hates; a person, furthermore, also has or can have intentions, and can act so as to fulfill them. God has all of these qualities and has some (knowledge, power, and love, for example) to the maximal degree. God is thus all-knowing and all-powerful; he is also perfectly good and wholly loving. Still further, he has created the universe and constantly upholds and providentially guides it (WCB, vii).

However, in the second quotation, there is a point of contact with Plantinga's understanding of infinity, as will become clear.

In WCB, infinity is explicitly mentioned first in a paragraph of the preface dedicated to summarizing the argument of the first part (WCB, x). In that description, Plantinga does not use any elaborate theory of that predicate's meaning. Instead, as is currently very common in philosophy and theology, he appeals

to its contrary, finitude, and to the commonplace that we are finite beings living in a finite world of finite things. This strategy is sufficient to gain what he wishes: to furnish the claim that our concepts do not apply to ITUBs with some degree of initial plausibility. We are finite beings forming our concepts immanently and in contact with a world of finitude. Hence, it is immediately plausible that our concepts will not, at least not without further ado, apply to a transcendent and infinite reality such as that of an ITUB. This argument is the opponent's thesis that Plantinga sets out to criticize in the first part of his book.

Subsequently, in considering the argument that concepts cannot apply to ITUBs, Plantinga is more explicit on his notion of infinity. The most relevant explanation is quoted in full:

> An infinite being, we might say, is an unlimited being—unlimited, that is, with respect to certain properties. Among these properties might be power, knowledge, goodness, love, and the like. (A being is unlimited with respect to power and (propositional) knowledge, for example, if there is a maximal degree of power and knowledge, and the being in question enjoys that maximal degree of those properties. It might be hard to say precisely what the maximal degree of these properties is; with respect to knowledge, we might begin by saying that a being displays that maximal degree if it knows all true propositions and believes no false proposition.) (WCB, 6)

According to this explanation, infinity is quite a complex concept, which seems to amount to a two-place relation with (a term for) a being x as the first argument and (a term for) a set of properties $P = \{P_1,...,P_n\}$ as the second argument. The relation holds in the case where the being has the properties in P to the maximal possible degree. Thus, P_i must come in degrees, and there must exist a maximal degree. Let us suppose the degrees can be represented as real numbers from the interval [0,1] with the maximal degree reached with the value of 1. Then, each P_i is itself a two-place relation $P_i(x,d)$ with the intended meaning that x enjoys P_i to the degree d. Hence, we obtain the following definition of infinity:

> A being x is called infinite with respect to a set of (great-making) properties $P = \{P_1,...,P_n\}$— Inf(x,P)—if and only if for all $P_i \in P$: $P_i(x,1)$.

This understanding of infinity is not unusual in philosophical and religious theology. However, one may discuss several points: Is it plain to identify infinity, unlimitedness and (here comes the point in question) maximality? At least if these concepts are intended to keep in touch with their precise counterparts in mathematics, it seems odd to identify them. Maximality and infinity are different because there are maximal values that are not infinite and infinite values that are not maximal. For example, the function $f(x)=-x^2$ has its maximum at $x=0$ / $f(x)=0$ which is, for sure, not infinite. And the identity function $f(x)=x$ on,

say, the first uncountable transfinite ordinal number ω_1 has infinite values (ω_0, for instance) but no maximum. Additionally, unlimitedness and infinity are distinct, for there are unlimitedly growing functions that do not reach infinite values and functions with infinite values that are limited. For example, $f(x)=x$ as a function on the natural numbers is growing without limit but does not take on infinite values. And the constant function $f(x)=\omega_0$ is limited (by ω_0 and every larger ordinal number) although it has only an infinite value. Furthermore, limitedness seems to be a property of functions (roughly, the function f is limited by a if for all x the value $f(x)$ is equal to or less than a), whereas maximality seems to be a property of single values of a function (roughly, a value $f(x)$ is a (local) maximum of f if there is a small environment of x such that in that environment, the values of f are equal to or less than $f(x)$). Surely there are connections between both concepts (if $f(x)$ is a local maximum, then in an environment of x, f is limited by $f(x)$; if f is limited by a, and f reaches a somewhere (for example, x is a point such that $f(x)=a$), then f has a local maximum there), but such connections between the concept do not permit to identify them.[14]

Whereas this point concerns the precise structure of the conceptual network Plantinga employs, another point is more relevant from the perspective of the philosophy of religion: does he truly presuppose that maximal degrees of each of the properties in P are then combined in the definition of an infinite being with regard to P? This issue is a special case of a general problem connected with the extension of properties: does the predicate "infinite" signify the combination of maxima or the result of maximizing them as far as their combination is still possible? Problems of that type are familiar in the philosophy of religion. For example, maximal power (all-powerfulness) as considered in itself will probably include the ability to produce a state of affairs no one can ever know about. However, if a being is not only all-powerful but also omniscient, it is hard to understand how such an unknowable state of affairs could be brought about without the all-powerful and omniscient being ceasing to exist or at least ceasing to have these properties (which are ordinarily thought to be essential properties of a being divine). Hence, combining after maximizing can make the conjunctive property incoherent. Instead, one should demand that a perfect being have all great-making properties to an extent to which it is logically possible for them to be combined. The Bohemian philosopher, mathematician and theologian Bernard Bolzano has, accordingly, incorporated that into his definition of a perfect being when he defines a being as perfect if it has all powers that are possible to

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14 For a more detailed discussion of the relation of mathematical and theological infinity-talk, cf. Tapp (2011).

have simultaneously and has these powers to the highest degree possible given the existence and degrees of the others.[15] A similar point has been made recently in an award-winning paper by Yujin Nagasawa, who claims that Anselmian perfect being theology implies the "MaximalGod Thesis" (which comes close to what I have presented as Bolzano's view), whereas most Anti-Anselmians base their attacks on the wrongly supposed "OmniGod Thesis" (which comes close to what I take to be the position Plantinga seems to unintentionally embrace).[16]

The notion of infinity becomes systematically most central in Plantinga's discussion of the position of the theologian Kaufman, who holds a version of the CA thesis. Plantinga analyzes Kaufman's argument for that thesis roughly as follows: God is infinite, hence not within the realm of our experience, and hence unreferrable. Plantinga doubts the first transition, from infinity to unexperienceability. He takes infinity to mean that God is "unlimited along several dimensions" (WCB, 34), especially with respect to power. However, how does that support the non-experienceability thesis? Plantinga asks a rhetorical question: "If God is omnipotent, infinitely powerful, won't he be able to manifest himself in our experience, bring it about that we experience him?" (WCB, 34). Plantinga has supported the claim implied by this question in advance by presenting examples from religious traditions claiming that God spoke to human beings and by recourse to William Alston's important work on not mere experience but perception of God. The infinite power of God warrants the assumption that he can produce every state of affairs he likes except those that are logically impossible. However, as there is no reason to interpret a state of affairs in which we experience God as logically impossible, there is good reason to suppose that an infinite God can produce such a state. Therefore, in light of Plantinga's analysis, it is "initially implausible to declare that God, if he is infinite and omnipotent, could not bring it about that we experience him" (WCB, 34). Hence, contrary to Kaufman's argument, God's infinity is more of a *pro* than a *con* with respect to the possibility of our experiencing him.

In Plantinga's discussion of Hick's position, infinity plays a crucial role in the context of the strongest argument against the coherence of Hick's position. The problem is that, according to Hick, infinity is a negative property: it signifies the absence of limits. Although that statement seems fairly standard, infinity entails, if it is not equivalent to, positive properties. In the spatial analogue Plan-

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15 Cf. Bolzano (1834, I, §74). Bolzano calls all great-making properties "powers" as they all enable a being to acquire something: knowledge by the power to think (*denken*), perception by the power to perceive (*empfinden*), actions by the power to will (*wollen*), creation of beings by the power to create (*schaffen*), and influence of beings by the power to change (*verändern*).
16 Cf. Nagasawa (2008).

tinga mentions infinity means *having no borders,* which implies *occupying all of space.*[17] In the case of infinity as a divine predicate, there is a similar implication. To understand this notion, we need to follow Plantinga's further analysis of the concept of divine infinity.

According to Plantinga, the doctrine of divine infinity has two components: divine infinity involves the *absence of limits in a certain respect* and *not to suffer limitations by anything else.* He takes his definition of divine infinity, which we have discussed (having all properties of a certain set of properties to the maximal possible degree), to cover both components. With respect to the second component, it is simply the maximal degree to which the Real has its properties that ensures that it cannot suffer limitations from other beings. For example, being omniscient, the Real has knowledge to such a degree that no other being can ever limit his knowledge, i.e., can ever bring it about that he does not know something that can be known. The same idea holds for omnipotence, which means having power to a degree such that "nothing can prevent him from doing what he wills" (WCB, 55).

With respect to the first component, Plantinga specifies his earlier considerations with an argument to the effect that God is not unlimited in every respect. Were God unlimited in every respect, he would have to have "every property to the maximal degree, which is impossible" (WCB, 55) because in that case, God as a spirit would also have to be a material object: "Rather, the traditional idea has been that God has every *great-making* property to the maximal degree" (WCB, 55). Thus, Plantinga specifies the set of properties included in the definition of infinity discussed above as being the set of *great-making properties.* However, infinity with respect to great-making properties entails positive properties of which we have a grasp. Being unlimited with respect to power, omnipotence, entails having power, which is not only a great-making but also a positive property of which we have a grasp, and this is a problem for Hick's negative theology approach that explicitly excludes all positive properties from God. The only resolution for Hick seems to be to take infinity as unlimitedness with respect to properties of which we have no grasp. This interpretation leads to the following bizarre construction of an image of God/the Real according to Hick: "It has the complement of every property we have a grasp of; it has other properties we have no grasp of; and the way in which it is infinite is that it has to the maximal degree some properties of which we have no grasp" (WCB, 55).

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17 In understanding spatial infinity as implying *occupying all of space*, Plantinga overtly departs from the mathematical standard use of "infinite". According to that standard use, the space between two parallel lines in the euclidean plane is infinite; according to Plantinga's use, it is not. What he has in mind while talking about "infinity" seems to be more like what mathematicians commonly call "unlimitedness", as will become clear in the next paragraph.

4 Conclusion

In the first part of WCB, Alvin Plantinga suggests a realist interpretation of Christian belief and defends the possibility to think about and linguistically refer to an infinite being such as God. I embrace most of what Plantinga argues on that topic in the first two chapters of WCB, in particular his critique of the Kantian, Kaufmanian and Hickian ways of endorsing versions of the thesis of conceptual agnosticism, i.e., the thesis that our concepts (at least the substantial ones) do not apply to the being to which religious speech acts and acts of worship are directed.

Besides pointing to the slightly artificial flavor of the alleged absurdity of predicating "being the creator of heavens and earth" of a mental construct, I have proposed in this paper, relative to Plantinga's view, a more constructive way to read Kaufman's (short-coming) reinterpretation of Christian belief, a stronger reading of Hick's conceptual emptification of the Real as a problem of coherence, an assessment of the range of logical arguments against a being with no properties, and a reconstruction of Plantinga's interesting ways of discussing divine infinity.

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