Responses to *JAT*'s symposium on *Theology without Metaphysics*

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As I understand it, 'analytic theology' is a theological approach characterized, above all, by a commitment to the precision, clarity, and rigor prized by analytic philosophers, and by a critical, creative appropriation of these philosophers' best insights. The field of theology—or, at least, I as a theologian—would benefit from increased rigor and broadened insight, so I welcome the emergence of this approach. I welcome the appearance of this journal for similar reasons, and am grateful to its editors for putting together this symposium on my book. I am likewise grateful to my four respondents for the time and care that they put into reading and thinking about my book, even if the remarks I am about to offer may at times seem more critical than appreciative.

I

Turning, then, to the responses, beginning with Dr. Long's. Dr. Long mischaracterizes my project in certain important respects, but this turns out to be good news since it means that the disagreements between us do not run quite as deep as he suggests. Consider Dr. Long's assertion that I "lump twenty-one centuries of philosophical arguments about being into one tradition, characterize it by two descriptive terms, and dismiss it as ontotheological" (Long 2013, 97). As a matter of fact, I do no such thing, and Dr. Long *thinks* that I do only because he mistakenly assumes that I take Heidegger to be "a reliable guide to the history of metaphysics" (Long 2013, p. 3), whereas I explicitly say that Heidegger is *not* a reliable guide to history, and that I am using his historical analyses solely for the sake of getting clear on Heidegger's own thought (Hector 2011, 4). Right there on page four, then, I unambiguously agree with Dr. Long that Heidegger is not a reliable guide to history, so I have to *disagree* with the criticism he here raises against me, along with related criticisms to the effect that I lump together, and then dismiss, the entirety of western metaphysics.

My aim is actually far more modest, which brings me to a second point: Dr. Long asks who is supposed to perpetuate "the diseased metaphysics for which we need therapy" (Long 2013, 95-96)? To understand my answer to this question, it is important to note not only that I do not endorse Heidegger's historical claims, but that I clearly say—right on pages two and three—that I am *not* trying to do without metaphysics in all of the relevant senses of that term, which means it is a mistake to infer that I think *all* metaphysics is "*diseased*" metaphysics. Quite the contrary. In the

book, rather, the exemplars of metaphysics are in fact those most stridently opposed to metaphysics, especially Jean-Luc Marion, John Caputo, and Heidegger himself, insofar as each of these figures takes it for granted that language is itself metaphysical (in the sense of shoehorning objects into predetermined categories), and so insists that objects, including God, must be thought to stand at a remove from it. Among other things, this should underscore the extent to which my project does *not* "depend...on Heidegger's philosophical reliability" (Long 2013, 97), contra Dr. Long's characterization of it.

This brings me to Dr. Long's other concerns, having to do with my alleged denial of any continuity between God and creation, or between the meaning of concepts as theologically and as ordinarily used. Dr. Long suggests, following Steven A. Long, that such a denial would entail that God-talk is unintelligible. I agree with both Drs. Long on this point, and I say so explicitly on pp. 129-30. My saying so, interestingly enough, is part of an argument to the effect that there must be some continuity between ordinary and theological meaning, so I have a hard time seeing why Dr. Long thinks that I deny such continuity. The crucial point for me is that an adequate account of such continuity should include a perspectival component: so I claim that our concepts *can* apply to God—indeed, such application is their fulfillment—but that they are recognizable as so fulfilled only retrospectively from that application, rather than prospectively from the trajectory of their prior applications (cf. 131). The idea here is to insist that our concepts can indeed apply to God, but that their application to God must judge *as well as* fulfill their usual meaning, since I want to resist the implication that the usual meaning determines in advance what a concept will mean as predicated of God. I have a hard time seeing what is exceptionable about any of this, and as I say (on p. 126), it brings my account within hailing distance of the *analogia entis* (126n29). It is wrong, in any case, to suggest that I defend an occasionalistic account of analogy, of the sort which sees no intrinsic continuity between our concepts and God's application of them to Godself, and so sees the latter application as a sheer miracle, utterly discontinuous with that which comes before or after. It is also wrong, then, to suggest that, on my account, one can "speak of God" only with "speech [that] does something other than expressing human ideas" (Long 2013, 95), and wrong to say that, for me, "it is not the creatureliness of [our] words that matters, but solely God's grace that renders them appropriate" (Long 2013, 103), as if I think that one has to choose between the two. Here again, then, Dr. Long's criticisms are based on a mischaracterization of my position, but as I mentioned earlier, this is good news, since it means that the disagreements between us do not run nearly as deep as he thinks. That is to say, I am not calling into question nearly as much as he thinks I am, and he is not calling into question nearly as much of my project as he thinks he is. If that is right, then I do not see why we—"we"!—cannot learn from one another, and even root for one another's projects to flourish.

II

Dr. Vanhoozer's generous paper is sprinkled with several perceptive, sometimes pointed, questions. Equally perceptive is Dr. Vanhoozer's recognition that my book defends a "highly formalized account of what it is to speak of God," and that, "by and large there is little *material* (i.e. dogmatic) description" (Vanhoozer 2013, 107 emphasis in original). Dr. Vanhoozer recognizes, then, that the model I defend is meant to be compatible with a fairly wide range of theological and philosophical commitments, and so tests the model's adequacy by asking whether it is compatible with some of *his* commitments. (Whereas some theologians, including many Barthians, would object to any theological model insofar as it is merely compatible with, rather than strictly consequent upon and so compatible *only* with, a particular understanding of God, it would appear that Dr. Vanhoozer is not among them. I think there are decisive rejoinders to the Barthian objection, but since it is not Dr. Vanhoozer's, I will not rehearse them here.)

Dr. Vanhoozer wants to know, accordingly, whether the book's model can do justice to several of his theological commitments, centrally those related to normativity. I cannot respond to all of his questions within the space of this response, but given the overlap among them, responding to two of them should indicate how I would respond to the rest. Consider first Dr. Vanhoozer's question about the doctrine of impassibility: "Scholars widely acknowledge," he writes, "that the early church almost universally agreed that one had to ascribe divine impassibility in order to speak well of God. That consensus today lies in shatters: divine passibility has become the 'new orthodoxy.'" This leads Dr. Vanhoozer to ask, "Surely it is nonsense to suggest that the concept of divine passibility 'goes on in the same way' as divine impassibility?...Could Hector's 'going on' ever lead us to abandon a concept once taken as authoritative by almost everyone, everywhere, at *most* times?" (Vanhoozer 2013, 116). The question, then, is whether my model can make sense of such shifts, since they seem to represent cases where (a) theological claims do not go on in the same way as precedent claims, yet (b) these claims are (at least arguably) correct.

It is not as if the book says nothing about such cases—I there write, for instance, that "we can, of course, imagine the possibility that a particular trajectory of judgments is, in fact, wrong, though we can make sense of this possibility only against a background of other trajectories which we continue to take as correct. In other words, one can contest any particular judgment or trajectory, just not all at once" (Hector 2011, 99)—but I gather that Dr. Vanhoozer is asking me to say more about how this would work in relation to particular instances such as that of impassibility. Fair enough. Consider a plausible, if highly simplified, account of how the doctrine of impassibility fell out of favor. Suppose at a certain time almost every Christian held at least two theological commitments: (a) a commitment to divine impassibility, and (b) a commitment to understanding God in light of Jesus. These commitments were equally prevalent and so, by hypothesis, there was no perceived incompatibility between them. Then suppose, at a later time, that commitments (a) and (b) came to seem at odds with one another—due, say, to historians' identification of certain intellectual influences on late-Antique understandings of

God, or biblical scholars' questioning of certain interpretations of scripture, or to impassibility falling out of favor as a cultural ideal—and that theologians, by and large, resolved the resulting incompatibility by claiming that commitment (b) is the normative standard by which to judge commitment (a). In such a case, these theologians might claim *both* that the old doctrine of impassibility must be discarded, *and* that discarding it *is precisely what it would mean to carry on the commitments of their predecessors*, insofar as their predecessors, too, thought that commitment (b) is the normative standard by which to judge all other theological commitments (thus including (a)). I take it that this is almost exactly the way contemporary passibilists defend their claims, and even if one disagrees with their conclusions, the reasoning itself seems sound. It seems to me, then, that my model can indeed explain why one would abandon a concept once taken as authoritative by almost everyone, and how one could come to see that concept as incorrect.

That brings me to the question about which Dr. Vanhoozer is most concerned, namely, "how does [or can] Scripture serve as the *supreme* norm if the norms are implicit in our dynamic social practices?" (Vanhoozer 2013, 115). In response, consider first what I say in the book: "Scripture has long been recognized," I write, "as both carrying on and standing in judgment over other judgments about what counts as following Christ, which seems to mean that one counts as going on in the same way as Christ just in case one's performances are recognizable as carrying on the normative trajectory implicit in a series of precedents which not only *includes* Scripture, but which itself recognizes the authority of Scripture." I go on: "To be sure, one's interpretation of Scripture must itself go on in the same way as that which was recognized by Christ, and this should be understood in terms of an interpretation's recognizability as going on in the same way as precedent interpretations that carry on his normative Spirit. Scripture does not replace the Spirit's work, in other words; it is taken up into it" (Hector 2011, 233n35). I am suggesting, then, that the canonization of Scripture can be understood as a work of the Spirit, and Scripture's canonicity in terms of its authority to judge all other judgments about what would count as following Christ. Such notions make perfect sense in terms of the book's overall argument, since one of its recurrent claims is that once a norm has been instituted, it takes on an objective status, such that it can stand in judgment over would-be followings of that norm. I am here saying, then, that Scripture can function as just such a norm for those who would follow Christ, and indeed as the *norming norm* (*norma normans*), since it can stand in judgment over all would-be following of Christ. This strikes me as a perfectly Protestant thing to be able to say. I am also saying here that the Spirit can be thought not only to have presided over the canonization of Scripture, but likewise to guide one's interpretation of it by conforming one to Christ, thereby giving one a feel, so to speak, for the proper reading of Scripture, as well as a set of precedents to direct that reading. Much more deserves to be said about all this, but again, these claims seem consonant with a characteristically Protestant understanding of Scripture. It seems to me, then, that my claims about normativity are indeed compatible with Dr. Vanhoozer's claims about Scripture, and that my model provides a way of integrating those claims with one of Protestantism's other key ideas about authority, namely, the priesthood of all believers.

I would argue, accordingly, that the model I defend in *Theology without Metaphysics* is compatible with Dr. Vanhoozer's normative commitments, and that its compatibility with these commitments—and many others—is one of its virtues. It is also compatible with what Dr. Vanhoozer calls a 'good' metaphysics, that is, the sort of metaphysics which "derives its categories from the train of God's own communicative action" (Vanhoozer 2013, 109) —though I would substitute "reinterpretation" for "derivation"), but I will hold off on addressing this until I respond to Dr. Crisp.

III

Turning, next, to Dr. Yadav, who agrees with me that theology would benefit from the adoption of a therapeutic approach to certain problems, but thinks that my book fails to provide the requisite therapy due to its (alleged) beholdenness to what Dr. Yadav terms 'externalism.' Dr. Yadav's argument goes something like this: (a) if Hector is an externalist, then he is liable to John McDowell's apparently devastating objections to externalism; (b) there is reason to think that Hector is indeed an externalist, since (i) Hector opposes essentialist-correspondentist metaphysics (EC), and the salient feature of EC is its internalism, and (ii) Hector's account appeals to responsive dispositions, and such appeals are characteristic of externalist approaches. I will argue, in response, that argument (b) fails due to its mischaracterization of my views, in consequence of which the conditions of (a) have not been met. This means, among other things, that I see Dr. Yadav and me as working along similar lines, rather than as finally at odds with one another.

As Dr. Yadav uses the term, a view is 'externalistic' if, in explaining the relationship between concepts and objects, it strictly separates the causal and normative-representational dimensions of that relationship (cf. Yadav 2013, 5-6). One might be surprised to hear that *Theology without Metaphysics* defends an account that is 'externalistic' in this sense, given that my account takes as basic what Schleiermacher calls *Gefühl*, that is, "a pre-reflective harmony or at-one-ness between oneself and one's environing circumstances [that] includes a kind of comportment to or disposition toward those circumstances" (Hector 2011, 78). Dr. Yadav nevertheless offers two reasons for thinking that my account is 'externalistic,' the first of which is based upon my opposition to EC. The argument here is straightforward enough: if (a) Hector thinks that EC is objectionably ontotheological (or idolatrous) precisely insofar as it is 'internalistic,' then (b) Hector's alternative must be 'externalistic.' This is what Dr. Yadav has in mind, I take it, when he writes that "what makes the EC picture 'metaphysical' in the sense that gives rise to ontotheology is just that it requires a kind of semantic internalism...Accordingly, Hector's proposed therapeutic alternative is 'anti-metaphysical' just insofar as it denies semantic internalism and embraces semantic externalism" (Yadav 2013, 124). I find this a bit puzzling, since my objection to EC is not that it is internalistic, per se, but that it fits objects (including God) into predetermined frameworks (including conceptual frameworks); this is how I put it in the book's very first sentence, for instance, on p. ix. I do object to one variety of internalism, namely the

sort that depends upon what Sellars calls the Myth of the Given (cf. Hector 2011, 151ff.), but there are internalisms that do not depend upon such Givenness—one need turn only a few pages in Sellars, to the Myth of Jones, for an example of this— just as there are versions of EC that reject Givenness, which is how I read some exemplars of apophaticism. The point, then, is that I do not see internalism as the salient feature of EC, nor as that which is objectionable about it, from which it follows that my rejection of EC does not collaterally commit me to externalism.

This is not Dr. Yadav's only reason for ascribing externalism to me, however; he also seems suspicious of appeals to responsive dispositions, since he seems to think that such appeals are incompatible with internalism, or else that they indicate a theorist's acceptance of "modern philosophy's" (alleged) assumptions about the realm of nature (on this point, see Yadav, 122-123, though it's worth noting that the quotation from *Theology Without Metaphysics*, p. 71 is taken pretty badly out of context). Later in his paper, though, Dr. Yadav's attitude toward such dispositions is a bit more open, and it becomes apparent that his problem is not with responsive dispositions themselves, but with the role they customarily play in externalist theories; he thus grants the possibility, for instance, "that the relation between our non-normative dispositions and our normative discourse *is* representational," but suggests that this possibility is not available to me, since availing myself of it would mean a return to "the internalism of EC and with it the problem of ontotheology" (Yadav 2013, 126). I have already indicated, however, that I have no objection to internalism per se, which may explain why I think my appeal to responsive dispositions does not itself commit me to externalism. Indeed, I take it that such dispositions—on my account, at least—are fully compatible with, and perhaps simply a different way of talking about, what McDowell means by "second nature" (of which Dr. Yadav approves). So then: while Dr. Yadav is right that I do not say much about what these internalist possibilities might look like—what it might look like to have God in mind, as it were—he is wrong to suggest that this is a necessary consequence of an alleged commitment to externalism. Given the aims and audience of my book, exploring such possibilities would probably have just muddied the waters. In any case, I genuinely look forward to seeing how Dr. Yadav avails himself of them, and to learning from him not as an opponent, but as an ally.

IV

That brings me, finally, to Dr. Crisp, whose very charitable reading of my book concludes with three significant objections. The first objection concerns the book's emphasis on practices, particularly my suggestion that they (along with attunement) are explanatorily basic. To this, Dr. Crisp objects that while there are certainly instances where practices have preceded the formulation of doctrines, there are many other instances where doctrines have preceded practices, such that practices could serve as a suitable explanatory primitive only for certain cases, not all. This strikes me as a fair objection to many practice-based accounts, but not mine, since my account includes much more than "official" practices like baptism and passing-the-peace; in principle, it includes *all* of our recognitive practices, the

vast majority of which are altogether un-official—instead of baptism, one should think here of the way one person's facial expression can be taken by others as how one responds to a particular circumstance. This strikes me as a significant difference from many of the practice-based accounts currently in circulation. More to the point, my account also makes an important place for *discursive* practices, especially those in which doxastic commitments are expressed and assessed. If we can think of doctrines as expressions of doxastic commitments, accordingly, then it doesn't appear that my model has any trouble accounting for them.[1]

Dr. Crisp's second objection concerns my suggestion that *norms*—a subset of which are *concepts*—change, if only slightly, every time they are applied. To this, Dr. Crisp rejoins that certain concepts do *not* change, namely those that have attained the status of dogma. He wonders here, specifically, whether my account can do justice to the apparently unchanging status of the doctrine of the Trinity, for instance, and of the Incarnation. In response to this, I would want to say—indeed, I *do* say—that certain applications of a norm can stand as precedents over other applications, which would seem to accommodate Dr. Crisp's insistence that certain conciliar decrees enjoy precedential status over all subsequent application of the concepts included in these decrees. I disagree with Dr. Crisp, however, insofar as he thinks that these concepts are frozen in place, so to speak, once the precedent has been set. It seems to me, on the one hand, that Dr. Crisp underestimates the extent to which conciliar pronouncements underdetermine that which will count as being faithful to those pronouncements—think here of all the varieties of Christology that would count as "orthodox" by Chalcedon's lights—and, on the other hand, even insofar as subsequent use of these concepts *is* determined by such pronouncements, that this does not entail that their meaning no longer changes. Briefly, if one accepts some version of semantic holism, then the meaning of any given use of these concepts is shaped by their relationship to an ever-changing constellation of other concepts; as a simple example, think here of what it means to speak of the persons of the Trinity: if the concept of "person" has changed over the years, then it follows that when one uses this concept to affirm that which was affirmed in the relevant precedents, that which one affirms has changed, too. (Unless, that is, one were to add a "whatever that means" clause to one's affirmation, but that strikes me as a non-starter.) It seems to me, then, that my model can do justice to the precedential status of dogmas, but not if dogma requires unchangingness of a sort that would lift it entirely above the fray of other normative commitments, and would allow only for *identical* sameness in subsequent affirmation, rather than the sort of sameness that allows for variations.

Turning finally to Dr. Crisp's third objection, which concerns my project's worries about "essentialism." This is an admittedly complicated issue, but I think it can be handled more or less along the lines just sketched: "essentiality" can be construed as a sort of meta-concept, which says of a concept that has been applied to some object that it is necessarily precedential for all subsequent

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[1] For an example of what this would look like, we might consider Basil of Caesarea's *De Spiritu Sancto*, in which he claims that his doctrine of the Holy Spirit was the expression of a doxastic commitment implicit in the discursive practices of the liturgy.

conceptualizations of the object, which is to say that any subsequent conceptualization that denied this precedent would not count as a conceptualization of *this* object. So one might apply the concept "triune" to God, and apply the concept "essential" to that concept, where the latter functions as a sort of norm governing the relationship of this norm (namely, triunity) to all other norms applied to God. (I suppose one could also apply the concept "ownmost essence" or "quiddity" to the concept "triune," which strikes me as relevantly different from the concept "essential," but which can be handled along the same lines.) So: does my "theology without metaphysics" reject metaphysical claims of this sort? Not necessarily. The relevant issue, as I see it, is not whether to countenance the possibility of essential properties, but whether these or any other properties have been (and continue to be) understood in light of the object of which they are predicated (rather than vice versa). Assuming that Dr. Crisp's metaphysics meets this condition, I have no objection to it, and it would not count as the sort of metaphysics that I am trying to do without. I meant to indicate this with my disclaimer on page two, and I am glad that Dr. Crisp seems to recognize this. I actually value the sort of work that he and other analytic metaphysicians are doing, and there is nothing in my book that is meant to call it into question (except insofar as they violate the condition just mentioned). I would say the same of Dr. Long's "re-Hellenizing" metaphysics, of Dr. Vanhoozer's "good" metaphysics, and of Dr. Yadav's therapeutic understanding of religious experience. I hope for the flourishing of all their projects, and I am earnestly grateful for their engagement with mine.

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