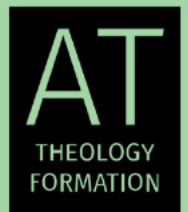


The Beauty of Analytic Theology

Volume 1: Introduction



A guide to
emerging
resources



“Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light through whom is splintered from a single White to many hues, and endlessly combined in living shapes that move from mind to mind.”
- J.R.R. Tolkien

The Beauty of Analytic Theology: An Introduction

A clear-cut definition of Analytic Theology (AT) can be slippery at times. It might be like trying to describe a flavor; you don't fully know it until you taste it. Likewise, maybe the best way to understand this analytic “flavor” of theologizing, is by immersing yourself in the discussion that is already blossoming amongst analytic theologians.

If nothing else, Analytic Theology is a way of doing theology that puts the strengths of analytic philosophy to use in understanding the things of God. But what if you don't know what analytic philosophy is? Should you just stop reading now? If you'll bear with us for just a bit, we think you'll find there are riches to be had, even for those at the lower end of philosophical literacy.

The reputation persists that the realm of AT is just full of logic-choppers, who spend all their time in the head and none in the heart (and never the two shall meet). Or, similarly, there's the rumor that God's most beautiful and awe-inspiring attributes become neutered by AT's relentless dialectic dissecting. Here, in *The Beauty of AT*, we attempt to reframe these attitudes.

Imagine the totality of our Christian belief and practice is like a cathedral, and each aspect of our faith is like one piece of its architecture. Our doctrine about prayer, God's love, atonement, sin, incarnation, etc., is all interconnected, each supporting the other like pillars and arches of a cathedral. You may at times start to think that one of these pillars seems like it doesn't make rational sense, which causes the adjacent arch to slump, and before long the ceiling is in danger of caving in. Well, there are resources for preventing this collapse, and even for reinforcing the beauty of this cathedral of faith, one pillar at a time. Each theological topic examined can steady the sacred space in which we worship.

This is a guide to a vault of AT resources, most of which were born out of a [3-year project](#), hosted at Fuller Theological Seminary. With each new article, lecture, or dialogue, AT brings clarity to metaphysical concepts, which previously may have felt too abstract to shed light on. Join us on this journey.



Getting the Basics

So, is religious belief a matter of logic and reason, or mystery and wonder? Analytic theologians say, *both*.

We can use the best practices of AT to iron out the wrinkles in our theology, but occasionally we reach the end of what human reason can do, and find a mystery at that boundary. Using AT-style discourse will help us discern between a wrinkle and a true Divine mystery.

Here is a kaleidoscope of thoughts on how to describe Analytic Theology from some of the important leaders of the movement:



[When we think about God | Analytic Theology in Dialogue](#)

“I see mystery not as something you cannot understand; rather, it is something that you can endlessly understand! There is no point at which you can say, “I’ve got it.” Always and forever, mystery gets you! In the same way, you don’t hold God in your pocket; rather, God holds you and knows your deepest identity.”
-Richard Rohr

“[AT values] transparency about one’s assumptions and specifically about the structure of one’s reasoning. The analytic philosopher will go out of his or her way to make clear what they are assuming and what the structure of their argument is, they will try to avoid decorative metaphors, and be really clear about the structure of their argument. They will, as much as possible, get out on the table, the structure of their reasoning. The ambitions are exploratory, theory-building ambitions. The ambitions are all about trying to build truly explanatory theories about the world.”

- Michael Rea (from Closer to Truth)



*It all started one day in Indiana over a cup of coffee.
Hear about how it all began on the podcast of St. Andrew’s
[Logos Institute, “Pogos”](#) (15 minute listen).*

Why does responsibly handling theology matter? Here's [Chris Woznicki](#)'s take.



PBS's "[Closer to Truth](#)" dedicated a full 26-minute episode of their series to investigating the strengths and weaknesses of Analytic Theology, and it's very much worth watching for the AT beginner.



**COSMOS.
CONSCIOUSNESS.
MEANING.**

Deep Dive:

[An Invitation to Analytic Christian Theology](#)

[Analytic Theology: A Bibliography](#)

[A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology](#)

[Logos Institute Resources](#)

[The AT Project Website](#)



At the start of the AT project, Dr. Oliver Crisp gave an overview to introduce the history and nature of the field. His paper “[Once More: Analytic Theology](#)” is presented beginning at the 6:47 mark, and ends around 44:00 (about a 37 minute listen). Some notes on the talk:

- 6:47 – Presentation begins (various announcements made prior).
- 16:00 – Distinguishing between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology
- 24:08 – A definition of AT
- 32:43 – Crisp’s personal preference for how to understand what AT is
- 44:46 – Presentation ends
- 45:12 Q&A begins
(First questions is about Crisp’s personal attraction/affinity for AT, up to 49:00)

Coming up next, we’ll start to see how analytic theologians do theology by looking at the topics of prayer, divine love, human nature, and more!

Thanks for reading.

“But you see, Analytic Philosophy and Analytic Theology are not just about analyzing arguments down to their parts and then assembling them back again. Swinburne makes a point in one of his papers that really since the 1970s and the resurgence of analytic metaphysics, it’s really more about world-building. And that’s what analytic metaphysicians are all about: systematic metaphysics. They’re trying to build complete pictures of the world using as few primitive concepts as possible, and to build up from that a whole picture of looking at the world... I think that might be very congenial to the systematic theology task, because I’m interested in world-building as well, because that’s what constructive theology is about. So, to the extent that I can utilize some of those concepts in that literature in order to pursue that task in theology, so much the better! If you want to call that analytic theology, that’s cool with me.” (1:48:38)