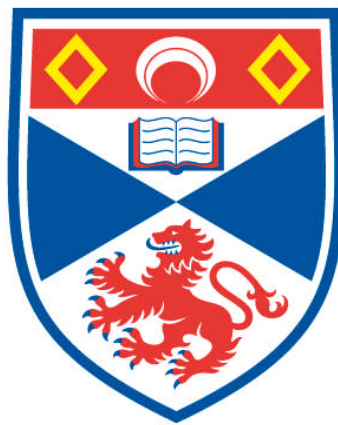# 'DIVINE SIMPLICITY: A DOGMATIC ACCOUNT'

Steven J. Duby

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**

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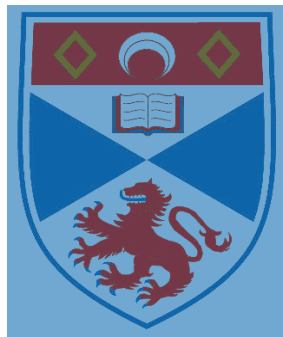Research@StAndrews:FullText
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'Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account'

Steven J. Duby

A Thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

University of St Andrews,

18 February 2014

Abstract

This thesis offers a constructive account of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Christian theology. In its methodology, the thesis aims to present this divine perfection as an implicate of the scriptural portrayal of God, to draw upon the insights and conceptual resources of Thomas Aquinas and various Reformed orthodox theologians, and to respond to some objections to divine simplicity. The focus on exegetical elaboration of biblical teaching and the use of Thomas and the Reformed orthodox distinguish this work from a number of recent accounts of God in both systematic theology and analytic philosophy. The case for God's simplicity is made by examining God's singularity, aseity, immutability, infinity, and act of creation in Holy Scripture and then tracing the ways in which these descriptions of God imply that he is (negatively) not composed of parts. Rather, he is (positively) *actus purus* and really identical with his own essence, existence, and attributes, each of which is identical with the whole being of the triune God considered under some aspect. In light of the constructive work, this study then addresses the three most pressing objections to divine simplicity: (1) that it denigrates God's revelation of his many attributes in the economy; (2) that it eliminates God's freedom in creating the world and acting in history; and (3) that it does not cohere with the doctrine of the Trinity.

1.   Candidate's declarations:

I, Steven J. Duby, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 89,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2010 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in May 2011; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2010 and 2014.

18 February 2014

2.   Supervisor's declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

18 February 2014

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

CD   Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Translated by G. W. Bromiley et al. London and New York: T & T Clark, 2009.

PG   *Patrologia Graeca*. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1857-1865.

PL   *Patrologia Latina*. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1844-1855.

ST   Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. In vol. 4 of *Opera Omnia. Editio Leonina*. Rome, 1888.

Introduction

The doctrine of divine simplicity is at once a long-time theological fixture in the catholic church and also a notion that has been vigorously called into question at various times in the history of Christian thought. Of late it has been deemed 'the heart of trinitarian doctrine' and yet also deplored as 'a dark saying indeed'.[1] Emerging from the reality of God in his singular and multi-faceted plenitude, the doctrine of divine simplicity is, in summary form, the teaching that God is not composed of parts but rather is identical with his own essence, existence, and attributes, each of which is identical with the whole being of the triune God considered under some aspect. Encompassing a network of theological commitments and also generating a number of questions and objections in various enclaves of theology proper, affirmation of God's simplicity elicits both dogmatic exposition and polemical clarification. In affirming and giving a positive account of this divine perfection, the present work sets out to prioritize dogmatic exposition and articulation but also, in view of recent debates about divine simplicity, to include clarifications and responses to pertinent objections. This undertaking is marked by several features.

First, this articulation of simplicity is impelled by the belief that, properly defined, simplicity is a divine attribute that stems from Holy Scripture's portrayal of God in his singularity, aseity, immutability, infinity, and work of *creatio ex nihilo*. In other words, this is not an iteration of the project of 'perfect being' theology but rather an exercise in

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[1] For the former, see Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keyes: Paternoster, 2012), p. 200. For the latter, see Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), pp. 27-8.

Christian dogmatics, setting forth the material content of exegesis in an elaborative, discursive manner, and then identifying implications for divine simplicity. Given recent criticisms of the doctrine which are to be canvassed below, it will be repeated that, when we speak of God's simplicity, we are speaking persistently of the triune God of the Bible.

Second, this account of divine simplicity draws especially from the works of Thomas Aquinas and Reformed orthodox figures, particularly ones influenced by Thomas' doctrine of God and metaphysical sensibilities more than theologians and philosophers such as Duns Scotus or Descartes. To be sure, the Reformed scholastic theologians in their prioritization of Scripture evince a measure of freedom and eclecticism in their selection of philosophical aids. Nevertheless, the dogmatic offerings of theologians such as Jerome Zanchi, Amandus Polanus, Gisbertus Voetius, John Owen, Francis Turretin, and Peter van Mastricht, and the metaphysical writings of Bartholomäus Keckermann, Johann Alsted, and Johannis Maccovius, generally lie along the Thomistic trajectory.[2]

While the patristic theologians – not least Augustine – provide valuable contributions to the Christian doctrine of God's simplicity, it is in scholastic theology that the formulation of the doctrine assumes a more systematic and sophisticated bearing. In this connection, Thomas' treatment of simplicity with its emphasis on God's ultimacy as the Creator of all things exemplifies orderly exposition of this attribute under the impact of the theological teaching of Scripture. In one of the farthest-reaching confirmations of

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[2] See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Three: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 108, 122, 132, 137. For further discussion of these theologians and their resonance with Thomas in theology proper, see below in chapter one.

God's simplicity in his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas observes that 'every composite is posterior to his own components, and dependent on these. But God is the first being.' In light of God's self-sufficiency and primacy as Creator of all, Thomas concludes that *Deus est omnino simplex*.[3]

Yet, the Reformed scholastic theologians in view in the present work, while influenced by Thomas and other medieval and early modern figures, devote more energy to scriptural exegesis and its implications for theology proper than is common in medieval scholastic thought. This naturally resonates with Reformation sensibilities and affords a welcome (though not at all materially drastic) reshaping of divine simplicity. At the same time, Reformed orthodox deployment of discursive reasoning in the doctrine of God loses none of the acuity seen in earlier scholastic theologizing, and its sensitivity to elenctic obligations in sketching divine simplicity yields a powerful set of resources for addressing contemporary concerns. The era of Reformed orthodoxy has often met with censure in modern theology, but this is due in no small part to misrepresentation. Indeed, recent scholarship has rendered indefensible any quick dismissal of these theologians.[4] Thus, the dogmatic account of divine simplicity set forth here aims first to be governed by biblical exegesis and yet also to employ a Thomistic Reformed orthodox approach to theology proper and the use of metaphysics for eduction of the theological implications of the biblical text.

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[3] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 8, corp., p. 47.
[4] The superlative studies in relation to theology proper are Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three* and his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Four: The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

Third, this re-presentation of God's simplicity takes seriously the reservations about the doctrine found in prominent modern systematic theologians as well as the criticisms advanced by analytic philosophers interested in Christian theology. For example, Karl Barth's criticism of traditional construals of the real identity of the divine essence and attributes, paired with his own broadly affirmative comments on the doctrine, must be addressed in any responsible account of simplicity today.[5] Likewise, a theologian such as Jürgen Moltmann's impassioned inclusion of *potentia passiva* in God, whereby God is able to suffer with his creatures, warrants a response in a commendation of a divine attribute stipulating that God is *actus purus*.[6] Similarly, Wolfhart Pannenberg states well the concern that simplicity entails a bifurcation of God's essence and his multi-dimensional economic action, and this too merits a response.[7]

Others in systematic theology will be mentioned below, but the field of analytic philosophy also is home to a number of critiques of divine simplicity. Plantinga's work has stimulated scholarly discussion as to whether divine simplicity requires that God should be an abstract 'property'.[8] Some, including Christopher Hughes, J. P. Moreland, and William Lane Craig, claim that the identification of God with his own essence and

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[5] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 323-35.

[6] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. x, 218, 230, 244.

[7] Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology', in *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays Volume II*, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 181; *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 362-3

[8] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 27-8, 47-53.

existence is mired in logical impossibility.[9] Others, such as Jay Wesley Richards, posit

that, because of the contingency of certain divine actions, there must be accidents

inhering in God.[10] Such concerns and counterproposals will receive attention in due

course, with responses influenced by Thomas and Reformed orthodox authors and aided

at certain points by recent authors sympathetic to the claims of divine simplicity.[11] The

constructive tenor of the thesis and its retrieval of Thomas and Reformed orthodox

theologians predominate throughout but are also accompanied by a subsidiary

commitment to respond to contemporary concerns that will be identified in the first

chapter.

The first chapter gives a general history of the Christian doctrine of God's

simplicity, beginning with the patristic era and extending into recent discussions in

systematic theology and analytic philosophy. While this is not presented as a

comprehensive history, it is meant to orient the reader and to furnish a backdrop for the

present work. In chapter two, the methodological traits and essential content of the

dogmatic account ventured here are outlined and upheld in contradistinction to hesitation

about discursive elaboration and metaphysical terminology and to the spirit of analytic

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[9] Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 21-8, 55-7; J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 524-5.

[10] Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 231-40.

[11] These include theologians like John Webster and Stephen Holmes. Without always giving full approbation as to methodology, critical appropriation of insights (particularly diagnostic ones) of analytic philosophers such as Brian Leftow also features here. The most potent contemporary defense of divine simplicity is James Dolezal's *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), and this work affords helpful traction for contemporary reaffirmation of the doctrine.

philosophical forays in Christian doctrine. The third and fourth chapters seek to

substantiate the claims of the doctrine of divine simplicity by demonstrating that they are

implied and required by the scriptural portrayal of God. Chapter three considers how

simplicity is inferred from God's singularity and aseity, while chapter four considers how

it is inferred from God's immutability and infinity and from the Christian doctrine of

creation. The fifth chapter seeks to respond to major objections to simplicity, and these

are three: (1) that the doctrine does not pay heed to the plurality of the divine attributes;

(2) that it eradicates God's freedom in creating the world and acting *pro nobis*; and (3)

that it cannot comport with the personal distinctions that must be made in the doctrine of

the Trinity. We come first to the historical development of the Christian doctrine of

God's simplicity.

I. Some Historical Bearings

A. Patristic Affirmations

The lineage of the notion of divine simplicity reaches back to the earliest stages of the church's reflection on biblical teaching. In the midst of a number of doctrinal controversies, the catholic church fathers are remarkably unified in denying composition in God and affirming that God is not just true and good, luminous and loving, but also truth and goodness, light and love.[12] A full account of the development of the doctrine lies beyond the parameters of this chapter, but some examples provide a glimpse of the basic patterns of patristic thought. A number of distinct occasions for invoking simplicity can be discerned. First, there is the critique of Gnosticism found in Irenaeus of Lyons and other church fathers. Irenaeus argues that, if his theological opponents had known the Scriptures, they would have observed a distinction between God and human beings. God is 'simple and not composite…and wholly like and equal to himself'.[13] Second, a more general fusion of God and the world in pagan thought comes under criticism and is overturned by the Creator-creature distinction, which is parsed by way of God's simplicity. Athanasius criticizes pagan theology in which the gods are parts of a whole: 'For God is a whole and not parts....[H]e is the Maker of the system of all things….For, if he united from parts, he will appear wholly unlike to himself and having fulfillment from

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[12] Of course, there are various outlying comments in the patristic writings. For example, colored by polemical engagement with Marcionism, there is in Tertullian the question of whether God can be considered 'from goodness simply' or 'from goodness alone' (*an Deus de sola bonitate censendus sit*) (*Adversus Marcionem*, in vol. 2 of *PL* [Paris, 1878], lib. 1, cap. 25, p. 302). Yet, even here the concern may be only that, if God should be called *bonitas*, he should not be divested of his other perfections.

[13] Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses*, in vol. 7 of *PG* (Paris, 1857), lib. 2, cap. 13, 3, p. 744.

unlike things.'[14] Significantly, for Athanasius, such God-world mereology is fundamentally Ἑλληνικὸν τὸ φρόνημα, 'Greek thinking' to be corrected by the teaching of *creatio ex nihilo* and its entailment of divine simplicity.[15] In these lines of thinking, there are both negative and positive expressions. On the one hand, God in his transcendent, incomprehensible mystery cannot be drawn into the sphere of created being. On the other hand, he should be recognized in positive terms as the God of perfect integrity and aseity.

Third, divine simplicity appears in the explication of trinitarian teaching. In Athanasius, lest the Father be composed of essence and quality, the Son cannot be in the Father as a qualitative wisdom but must himself be essentially God from God.[16] To promote sound understanding of trinitarian action and of the relationship between the Father and the Son, Hilary of Poitiers insists that God does not pass from idleness to activity and writes, 'God is simple….And he is not so diverse with parts of a composite divinity that there should be in him either, after stupor, will, or, after idleness, work.'[17] In the trinitarian teaching of Gregory Nazianzen, divine simplicity secures the equality of the persons: as there is one Godhead (μία θεότης), so there is one God (ἑις Θεὸς), and thus in the case of the persons one is not 'more' God and another 'less' God (τὸ μὲν

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[14] Athanasius, *Oratio contra Gentes*, in vol. 25 of *PG* (Paris, 1857), pars 1, 28, p. 56.

[15] Athanasius, *Orationes adversus Arianos*, in vol. 26 of *PG* (Paris, 1857), II, 22, p. 192. For a recent exploration of the importance of *creatio ex nihilo* in relation to patristic theology proper, see Janet Martin Soskice, 'Athens and Jerusalem, Alexandria and Edessa: Is There a Metaphysics of Scripture?', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), pp. 149-62. The connection between *creatio ex nihilo* and divine simplicity will be expounded in chapter four of this study.

[16] Athanasius, *Orationes adversus Arianos*, IV, 1-5, pp. 467-76.

[17] Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, in vol. 10 of *PL* (Paris, 1845), lib. 9, 72, pp. 338-9.

μᾶλλον, τὸ δὲ ἧττον Θεός). Instead, the Godhead (ἡ θεότης) is 'undivided in separate persons' (ἀμέριστος ἐν μεμερισμένοις).[18]

The importance of divine simplicity in speaking of the divine unity and the three divine persons in the patristic period is displayed well in Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Here God bears no *accidentia* but is identical with each of his attributes, all of which are really identical with one another: 'Truly God is indeed multiply called great, good, wise, blessed, true…but his same greatness is wisdom, and the same goodness is wisdom and greatness, and the same truth is all those.' When God is referred to creation with names such as 'Lord', 'wrath', and so on, he does not acquire accidents. Rather, when he is called *relative aliquid ad creaturam*, accidents accrue not to the substance of God but to the creature. For example, 'God is relatively called our refuge, because he is referred to us, and then is our refuge, when we take refuge in him.' Further, divine simplicity derives from and then also reinforces for us the fact that the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal and, indeed, that each is equal to the whole Trinity: 'And so when so great is the Father alone [*tantus est solus Pater*], or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone, so much [*quatenus*] is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time, he [God] is in no way called triple [*triplex*].'[19] These patterns of thought eventually feature in Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* and point toward forthcoming scholastic developments, which are epitomized in Thomas and inherited by Reformed orthodox theologians.

Boethius deploys the resources of Aristotelian philosophy for clarification of trinitarian teaching and repudiates composition in God. Every creature has conjoined

[18] Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio XXXI Theologica Quinta*, in vol. 36 of *PG* (Paris, 1858), 14, pp. 148-9.

[19] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, in vol. 42 of *PL* (Paris, 1845), lib. 5, cap. 4, 5, p. 913; cap. 16, 17, pp. 922-4; lib. 6, cap. 7, 8-9, p. 929.

parts and therefore has 'its own existence [*esse suum*] from those from which it is', but God is not *ex hoc atque hoc sed tantum est hoc* and therefore is uncaused. Hence, 'God' spoken thrice with regard to the Father, Son, and Spirit is *repetitio…ejusdem non numeratio diversorum*. Each of the three is *idem* (the same essentially), though not *ipse* (not identical so as to elide personal distinction).[20] Again, the negative point about the absence of composition in God is complemented by a positive point, namely, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each the one God in personal distinctness. Finally, in the East, John of Damascus captures well the catholic outlook in calling God 'simple' (ἁπλοῦν), 'uncompound' (ἀσύνθετον), 'surpassing God' (ὑπέρθεον), 'surpassing goodness' (ὑπεράγαθον), 'surpassing fullness' (ὑπερπλήρη), 'very light' (αὐτοφῶς), 'very goodness' (αὐτοαγαθότητα), 'very life' (αὐτοζωὴν), 'very essence' (αὐτοουσίαν), with 'one deity' (μίαν θεότητα), 'one willing' (μίαν θέλησιν), 'one operation' (μίαν ἐνέργειαν) 'made known in three perfect subsistences' (ἐν τρισὶ τελείαις ὑποστάσεσι).[21]

B.   **Medieval Developments**

The medieval theologians carry forward the fathers' trajectory, drawing from Holy Scripture and the tradition and also engaging liberally in philosophical discourse. Several prominent figures set the stage well for continued reflection on the notion of divine simplicity. In the eleventh century, Anselm explains that, in his supremacy, God must be simple: 'Every composite that subsists requires these from which it is composed,

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[20] Boethius, *De Trinitate*, in *The Theological Tractates*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand (London: Heinemann, 1973), II, 3; III.
[21] John of Damascus, *Expositio de Fide Orthodoxa*, in vol. 94 of *PG* (Paris, 1864), lib. 1, cap. 8, pp. 808-9.

and it owes that it is [*quod est*] to those. For whatever it is, it is by those, and those that

are, they are not by that. And, therefore, it is not entirely the highest.' The *summa*

natura is all good things, but 'it is necessary that all those are not many but one.' 'Any

one of these, then,' Anselm reasons, 'is the same that all are….And so just as anything

essentially spoken concerning the highest substance is one, so itself in one mode, in one

consideration is whatever it is essentially.'[22] Prayerfully, then, Anselm declares in the

Proslogion, *Tu solus ergo, Domine, es quod es; et tu qui es.* 'For what is one thing in the

whole and another in the parts, and in which something is mutable, it is not in every way

what it is….You truly are what you are, because whatever sometimes or in some way you

are, this wholly and always you are.'[23] Like his patristic predecessors, the Archbishop of

Canterbury makes use of simplicity in expounding the doctrine of the Trinity. The

Father, Son, and Spirit each are *summe simplex unitas* and so are co-equal. In view of

God's simplicity, what proceeds from the Father cannot be other (*aliud*) than the Father.

'What each one is, this the whole Trinity at once is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For

each one is nothing other than the highest simple unity and highest one simplicity, which

cannot be multiplied or be one and another [*aliud et aliud*].'[24]

Despite Anselm's clear commitment to divine simplicity, one of his pupils,

Gilbert de la Porrée, bishop of Poitiers from 1142-54, was accused of positing in God real

distinctions among essence and persons, essence and existence, and essence and

attributes in his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*. Though Gilbert was given

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[22] Anselm, *Monologion*, in vol. 1 of *Sancti Anselmi cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1946), cap. 17, p. 31.
[23] Anselm, *Proslogion*, in vol. 1 of *Sancti Anselmi cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, cap. 22, p. 116.
[24] Anselm, *Proslogion*, cap. 23, p. 117.

opportunity to clarify his position, and confirmed that he did not hold to composition in God, such thinking was condemned at the Synod of Paris in 1147. A year later at the Synod of Rheims in 1148 several pertinent propositions formulated by Bernard of Clairvaux were accepted as dogma. The propositions stipulated that there is no real distinction between God and his Godhead, that the essence is not divided by the persons of the Trinity, that the personal properties of the three are not separable from God himself, and that the essence is not divided by the incarnation of the Son.[25] The twelfth century is significant also on account of the production of Lombard's *Sententiae*. The great medieval textbook consolidates previous Christian teaching on God's simplicity. God's essence 'is truly simple, where there is diversity or variation or multitude neither of parts nor accidents nor any forms'. Over against the creaturely possession of really distinct qualities, God has no accidents and is not subject to the Aristotelian *praedicamenta*. Because he does not receive accidents or undergo change by inhesion of accidents, God is therefore only *abusive* called 'substance'. With the *simplicitas* and *sinceritas* of the essence, 'there is not anything in it that is not itself, but the same is the one having and what is had.'[26]

In the thirteenth century, Thomas develops this theological heritage and delivers a particularly robust presentation of God's simplicity that can be held up as one archetypal rendition of this attribute in a three-pronged medieval taxonomy. Duns Scotus and William of Ockham model two other prominent options, and their accounts also are to be sketched below with brief comment to suggest the relative strength of Thomas' position.

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[25] The history is helpfully recounted in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:36-7.
[26] Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum Libri Quator*, in vol. 192 of *PL* (Paris, 1853), lib. 1, dist. 8, 4, 7-9, pp. 544-5.

We may examine Thomas' account by considering first his articulation of God's pure actuality and then, in light of that actuality, seven critical points that Thomas makes in the *quaestio* on simplicity in the *Summa Theologiae*. Fundamental to Thomas' account of simplicity is the assertion that God is not composed of potentiality and actuality. As the Creator and first being, God can have no potentiality or passive potency. For what is in potency, in virtue of that potency, 'does not educe itself from potency to act.' Therefore, there must be something prior in act 'by which it is reduced to act.' However, since God is the Creator and first being with none prior to him, he must be *actus purus*.[27]

First, therefore, it is apparent that God cannot be composed of bodily parts because bodies have residual potential in being infinitely divisible.[28] Second, God is not composed of matter and form because the former stands in potentiality to the latter. In addition, a matter-form composite owes its perfection and goodness to its form and thus relies on its participation in the form to possess its goodness. But God is the highest good, without need of obtaining goodness by participation and is therefore not composed of matter and form.[29] Third, God is not composed of nature and *suppositum*. For he is without matter, which individuates *supposita*. Therefore, he is his own subsisting form, which, in the case of incorporeal substances, is identical to essence.[30]

Fourth, God as *forma subsistens* does not fully secure the distinctiveness of God's simplicity because every *substantia separata* (substance separate from matter, as in the case of an angel) also is its own form as a subsisting *suppositum*: 'the quiddity of a

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[27] Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, in vol. 13 of *Opera Omnia, Editio Leonina* (Rome, 1918), lib. 1, cap. 16, pp. 44-5; *ST*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3, corp., p. 31.
[28] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 1, corp., pp. 35-6.
[29] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 2, corp., p. 37.
[30] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3. art. 3, corp., pp. 39-40.

simple thing is the simple thing itself, because there is not something else receiving it.'[31]

Nevertheless, such a created substance is not entirely simple. In particular, its essence and existence are really (or objectively) distinct from one another. For its essence, which cannot be understood without all the things pertaining to it being understood, can be understood without any knowledge of whether it actually exists.[32] Of course, one might ask whether this establishes only a rational *essentia-esse* composition in creaturely substances because it is an argument from human cognition, not, strictly speaking, from objective reality itself. However, Thomas adds that only one being can enjoy an identity of *essentia* and *esse*. For this one must be *ipsum esse subsistens*.[33] But, if there were more than one, *esse* would have to be multiplied by specific difference and some principle of individuation in order to be distinct in more than one. Thus, it would no longer be just *esse subsistens*. There is but one whose *essentia* and *esse* are identical and, indeed, there must be one for whom this is so, for everything that convenes with something is either *ex principiis naturae suae* or *ab aliquo principio extrinseco*. But *esse* cannot be from the essence of a thing, lest the thing be its own efficient cause, and so it must be from another. Insofar as this cannot regress *in infinitum*, there must be one who

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[31] Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, in vol. 43 of *Opera Omnia, Editio Leonina* (Rome, 1976), cap. 4, p. 376. The first clause is a quotation from Avicenna. Since specific form must be individuated and multiplied by matter, each 'simple substance' is a species unto itself: *quot sunt ibi individua tot sunt ibi species* (*De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 4, p. 376).

[32] For example, one can know what a man is (or would be) without ever knowing whether he is.

[33] Because the discussion concerns *substantiae separatae*, in which the substance is the form or essence itself, an *essentia-esse* identity entails an identity of *suppositum* and *esse*, which, in turn, entails that such a *suppositum* would be *ipsum esse subsistens*.

has *esse* neither *ex natura* nor *ab alio* but rather is *ipsum esse subsistens*, and this one is God.[34]

Fifth, in view of God's pure actuality, Thomas also argues that God cannot be located in a genus. For genus relates to difference as potentiality to actuality, but in God there is no potentiality which may be reduced to actuality. Moreover, God's *essentia* is his *esse*. But genus respects *essentia* (albeit indistinctly in contrast to species), and this would mean that in God's case genus would respect *esse* and be differentiated somehow by non-being, which cannot occur. Further, genus assumes agreement in quiddity among its members and diversity in existence. Therefore, the essence and existence of anything in a genus are objectively distinct. But, as Thomas has already reasoned, God's essence and existence are identical, so God cannot be in a genus.[35] Sixth, God is not composed of substance and accidents. For a subject is reduced from potentiality to actuality by its accidents, but in God there is no potentiality. In addition, because God is *ipsum esse*, nothing, including accidents, can be added to God.[36] Accidents also presuppose causation. For accidents are caused by the principles of the subject. But God is *causa prima* and thus nothing in him can be caused.[37]

Seventh, Thomas supplies some more general reasons as to why God is incomposite: 'every composite is posterior to his own components, and depends on these. But God is the first being.' In addition, 'every composite has a cause. For things which

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[34] Thomas, *De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 4, p. 377; *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4, corp., p. 42. In *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas is not concerned with laying out an ontology of creaturely substances but with more directly discovering what must be true of God if he is the first efficient cause who is wholly *actus*.

[35] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 5, corp., pp. 43-4.

[36] Here Thomas is drawing from Boethius' *De Hebdomadibus*.

[37] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 6, corp., pp. 45-6.

are diverse according to themselves do not convene in some one, except by some cause

uniting them. But God does not have a cause…because he is the first efficient cause.'[38]

Yet Thomas' account of divine simplicity does not lead him to eliminate all distinctions

in God. The divine 'names' signify *unam rem*, God himself or God's essence, but they

are not synonymous. Rather, they signify that one thing *sub rationibus multis et

diversis*.[39] Indeed, these *rationes diversae* are not merely *ex parte ipsius ratiocinantis

sed ex proprietates ipsius rei*.[40] Further, the divine persons are really distinct from one

another. If it were otherwise, there would be no *trinitas realis* but only *trinitas rationis*

as in Sabellianism. Yet such real distinctions in God cannot be said *secundum rem

absolutam* but just *secundum rem relativam*.[41]

Taking up the matter of divine simplicity later in the thirteenth century, Duns

Scotus explicitly positions himself as an advocate of the doctrine, even as he differs from

Thomas on certain points.

> God is in every way simple. And about this are three things to be shown: first,
> that in his own essence he does not have composition, so that there is not a
> composition of essential parts (which is said to be essential composition); second,
> that there is not a composition of quantitative parts, so that he does not have
> quantity; and third, that there is not a composition of accident with subject.[42]

Yet, Scotus also moves beyond Thomas' approach to the distinctions among the divine

perfections. While rejecting the claim that the perfections are distinct *realiter*, he still

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[38] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 7, corp., pp. 46-7.
[39] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 4, pp. 144-5.
[40] Thomas, *In Quator Libros Sententiarum*, in vol. 6 of *Opera Omnia* (Parma, 1856), lib. 1, dist. 2, qu. 1, art. 2, p. 22. The difference between a *distinctio rationalis per rationem ratiocinantem* and a *distinctio rationalis per rationem ratiocinatam cum fundamento in re* will be explored later in this thesis.
[41] Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 28, art. 3, corp., p. 324.
[42] John Duns Scotus, *Lectura*, in vol. 17 of *Opera Omnia*, *Editio Vaticana* (Vatican City, 1966), lib. 1, dist. 8, pars 1, qu. 1, p. 2.

maintains a *distinctio in re ante operationem intellectus*, a *distinctio ex natura rei* or

distinctio formalis in particular. He comments that 'one perfection does not formally

include another, so that they are not the same formally nor have formal identity.' Several

arguments are given for this distinction, among which is the argument that, if the

perfections have different *rationes*, they cannot be one and the same formally: 'when

there are two reasons of which one does not include the other, whatever does not vary the

reason of these does not make that one should include the other formally….[T]hen

whatever added thing [e.g., *infinitas*] does not vary the reason of one or the other does not

make that one formally includes the other.'[43] Thus, the Subtle Doctor does not posit real

distinctions in God as to *res* and *res*, but he does seek more than just a formally singular

foundation in God himself for the attributes. Accordingly, he posits formal distinctions

not just in human apprehension of God but also in God's own essence.[44]

While Scotus' view of distinctions among the attributes presses beyond that of

Thomas, Ockham's view moves in the opposite direction. For Ockham, Scotus'

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[43] John Duns Scotus, *Lectura*, lib. 1, dist. 8, pars 1, qu. 4, pp. 62-3. Scotus' thinking here is bound up with his commitment to univocity about God's perfection and creaturely perfection.
[44] On the matter of Scotus' teaching in relation to Thomas' distinction arising *ex proprietate ipsius rei*, Allan Wolter writes, 'Scotus, with his usual subtlety, is simply spelling out what such a statement implies, viz. that such "property-differences" are based upon what a thing is or is not in actuality. Two objects are not formally identical *a parte rei*, if one can be imitated without the other or if one can be distinctly known for what it is apart from the other. Some way of expressing this nonidentity or distinction of intelligible content, or imitable perfection, is needed.' Though Scotus aims to clarify that the distinction cannot be produced by the mind in the act of knowing, he at times does call this a *distinctio rationis*, which suggests that 'he did not claim the nonidentity in question apart from some reference to the intellect.' The distinction is 'prior to the *act* of thinking' but not necessarily 'prior to the possibility of thought'. The form as 'the possibility of being known' and the intellect as 'the possibility of knowing' are *simul natura* (*The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990], pp. 32-4).

distinctio ex natura rei or *distinctio formalis* among the attributes in the essence itself

implies *distinctiones reales* in God himself. Outlining three species of distinction – one

between *entia reales*, one between *entia rationis*, one between *res et ratio* – Ockham

states that the *distinctio ex natura rei* in the divine attributes must (fatally) be of the first

species. For, 'when the same thing [here, the *ratio formalis* of a given attribute] is truly

affirmed [of one attribute] and truly negated [of another attribute] simply and

absolutely…then it reaches to infer real non-identity.'[45] Thus, divine wisdom, for

example, does not merely formally *include* divine goodness but rather formally *is* the

divine goodness.[46] According to Ockham, there is just one divine perfection, which is

identical to the divine essence itself. Given the singularity of the divine perfection, it

cannot contain a *fundamentum in re* that generates or accounts for our diverse

conceptions of God's perfections. Indeed, the proposition that the perfections might be

the same *realiter* and yet different *rationaliter* is fundamentally illogical. For one and the

same thing cannot be *res* (in this case, a perfection which is really identical to the divine

essence) and *ens rationis* (in this case, a concept thought to pertain to the divine

essence).[47] Accordingly, any distinction among the attributes is purely conceptual and

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[45] William of Ockham, *Ordinatio*, in vol. 2 of *Opera Theologica*, ed. Stephanus Brown and Gedeon Gál (St. Bonaventure: University of St. Bonaventure, 1970), lib. 1, dist. 2, qu. 1, pp. 14-16.
[46] Ockham, *Ordinatio*, lib. 1, dist. 2, qu. 1, p. 30.
[47] Ockham writes that 'being is first divided into real being [*ens reale*] and rational being [*ens rationis*]….[T]herefore, nothing that is having precisely objective existence [*esse objectivum*, i.e., existence only as an object of the mind] is really some real being, and *per consequens*, if those attributes have merely *esse objectivum* and *per consequens* are rational beings, they cannot be really the divine essence itself' (*Ordinatio*, lib. 1, dist. 2, qu. 2, p. 54).

reduces to the diversity present in the terms that we use to signify God: it is better to say that 'the intellect forms those reasons about itself more than about the essence.'[48]

The medieval era thus yields at least three distinct ways of construing God's simplicity with respect to the divine attributes. The Thomistic route insists that the distinctions among the attributes are discerned by analysis of the essence itself (*ratio ratiocinata*) and have an objective foundation in God or at least in God's works (*fundamentum in re*). Scotus goes further and attempts to locate the *fundamentum* in formal distinctions among the attributes in God himself. Ockham rejects both the Thomistic and the Scotist views as betrayals of divine simplicity, repudiating the distinction arising *ex ratione ratiocinata* and the Scotist formal distinction and positing a purely conceptual and subjective distinction.

In view of the preference for Thomas in this thesis, a brief note on the strength of his approach in relation to Scotus and Ockham may be in order before resuming the primarily descriptive work of this section. While Scotus is right to emphasize that the divine perfections are in God *ante operationem intellectus*, his insistence that they are so in formal plurality in God himself arguably says more than is required here. In particular, while the material content of each perfection is undoubtedly in God before our cognition of God, the distinctness of the *ratio formalis* of each perfection arises in the field of the economy as God's essence impinges on the creature with various effects. At this juncture, Alsted, for example, provides a surer way forward in indicating that Scotus' *distinctio formalis* or *distinctio ex natura rei* for the divine perfections faces the problem

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[48] Ockham, *Ordinatio*, lib. 1, dist. 2, qu. 2, p. 54. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 922-5, 934-60; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:74-6.

of positing multiple actual infinites, and Alsted comments that the perfections taken *interne* or *ex parte Dei* are distinct only *in ratione ratiocinante* while the perfections taken *externe* or *respectu operationum* hold a *distinctio virtualis* and *formalis*.[49] Ockham, on the other hand, says less than is required here and fails to catch up the objective diversity of the perfections in the biblical text. In his rejection of a *fundamentum* for the distinctions among the attributes, he does not discriminate between the *fundamentum in re* as to God himself absolutely and the *fundamentum in re* as to God in relation to creation or as to the effects of divine action.[50] As to the former, while the *fundamentum* (God's essence) includes the material content of all his perfections, there is no extramental distinction among the perfections; as to the latter, there is a *distinctio virtualis* that enjoys an extramental foundation and still preserves the unity of the essence and perfections *in se*. *Pace* Ockham, this does not entail that the perfections are at once

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[49] Johann Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis* (Antonius Hummius, 1615), pars 1, cap. 4, pp. 38-40, 44-6. In an earlier work (*Metaphysica, Tribus Libris Tractata* [Herbornae Nassoviorum, 1613], lib. 1, cap. 29, p. 245), Alsted attempts a reconciliation of Thomas and Scotus via the *distinctio virtualis*. On the *distinctio virtualis* coupled with the *distinctio formalis ad nos*, compare Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 2nd ed., vol. 1. (Geneva, 1688), III, qu. 5, 5-9, pp. 206-7. While a *distinctio realis* is a distinction between two (separable) things and a *distinctio formalis* is a distinction between two distinct formal *rationes*, a *distinctio virtualis* is a distinction that respects the power or capacity of a thing to generate diverse operations and effects: what is virtually distinct is one *in se* and possesses in singularity what is diverse in others and yet is distinguished in relation to its external objects. Insofar as this implies an 'eminent virtue, which can be the principle of diverse actions', it is bound up with the *distinctio eminens* or *distinctio per eminentiam*. Insofar as this entails that the human mind discerns the distinction at this point but with an extramental basis, it is bound up with the *distinctio rationalis per rationem ratiocinatam cum fundamento in re*. See Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 5, 6, 8, 13-16, pp. 206-7. As in Alsted, in Turretin it is the *distinctio virtualis*, in which the divine perfections are distinct not *a parte principii…sed in ratione termini et objecti*, that then funds the *distinctio formalis* as to the perfections in God's economic action and in our minds.

[50] In this connection, Alsted distinguishes between a *fundamentum in re immediatum* and a *fundamentum in re mediatum* (*Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 29, pp. 240, 242).

res and mere *entia rationis*, for the perfections as the divine essence itself just are (one) *res* while our consideration of them occasions the distinction of them without materially creating or altering them.

C.   Protestant Reaffirmations

The early Protestant leaders devoted much of their intellectual energy to pressing questions regarding authority, soteriology, and ecclesiology. Nevertheless, in order to set forth adequate expositions of Christian doctrine for the church and to promulgate their views in the theological and philosophical milieu of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both the Lutherans and the Reformed offer accounts of God drawing from patristic and medieval resources and reworking these according to their own exegetical convictions and theological and philosophical sensibilities. Here we note briefly two early Lutheran and Reformed affirmations of divine simplicity, observe the continuation of this in Lutheran orthodoxy, and then proceed to the place of divine simplicity in Reformed orthodoxy as it is articulated by theologians in its earlier and later periods.

After omitting extended discussion of the *locus de Deo* from the first edition of his *Loci Communes*, Philipp Melanchthon includes it in later editions of his work.[51] On the matter of divine simplicity, he writes that the divine attributes are not *accidentia* or *res mutabiles* but are *ipsa essentia*, which is 'by itself subsisting'.[52] These claims in the *Loci Communes* do not receive lengthy analysis or substantiation, but it is worth noting

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[51] For example, Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici* (Basil, 1546), pp. 6-20.
[52] Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici*, p. 15.

that they are present in Lutheran theology even before the onset of the seventeenth century.

Likewise, in his *Institutio*, John Calvin writes of the spiritual and immense essence of God and then discusses the triune distinctions in God with reference to divine simplicity. Calvin outlines an order in the Trinity of persons and applies this to the divine *agere*, following with the observation that hypostatic distinctions do not overturn the simplicity of the essence. For 'in any *hypostasis* the whole nature is understood,' with the qualification that each *hypostasis* has his own personal property. Description of the distinctions, as Augustine notes, concerns the mutual relations of the persons (*ad se invicem referuntur*), rather than 'the substance with which they are one'. In short, 'under the name of God is to be understood an essence one and simple, in which we comprehend three persons or *hypostaseis*.'[53] From the beginning, then, magisterial Reformation theology embraces the doctrine of divine simplicity, even if the treatment of God's attributes becomes more systematic and elaborate over time in Lutheran and Reformed thought.

Among the Lutheran orthodox theologians, Johann Gerhard employs texts such as Exodus 3:14 and Deuteronomy 6:4 to guide theological reflection on the unity of God. After mentioning several 'species of unity' (in continuation, subject, genus, species, definition), Gerhard writes, 'These modes of unity, because they are imperfect, in like manner do not belong to God, who…is called one…in the most perfect mode of unity,

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[53] John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis, in Libros Quator*, 5th ed. (Geneva, 1559), lib. 1, cap. 13, 1, 19-20, pp. 31-40.

namely a most simple and undivided essence.'[54] Even in cognizance of the debates with

the Reformed about the *communicatio idiomatum* in Christology, a later Lutheran

scholastic such as Johann Quenstedt defends God's simplicity alongside affirmation of an

intrinseca κοινωνία of the divine and human natures of Christ.[55]

The Reformed orthodox theologians reiterate God's simplicity in continuity with

the catholic tradition and under the weight of biblical exegesis. If one divides the epoch

of orthodoxy into the early (c. 1565-1640), high (c. 1640-1685), and late (c. 1685-1725)

eras,[56] the Reformed theologians in each of the three distinguishable periods are unified

on the essential content of the doctrine of divine simplicity while still showing some

diversity of opinion on finer points. Because of the centrality of Scripture in Reformed

orthodox theology, and because of these theologians' willingness to utilize insights from

various philosophical systems, one ought not to suggest that they follow Thomas (or any

other earlier theologian or philosopher) in a slavish or exclusive way.

For example, Alsted (1588-1638), an early orthodox professor of philosophy and

theology in Germany at Herborn, analyzes the general nature of identity and distinction in

his *Metaphysica* with congenial reflection upon both Thomistic and Scotist

categorizations and with substantive interaction with the early modern Jesuit philosopher

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[54] Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1863), loc. 2, cap. 6, 96, p. 288.
Gerhard also criticizes certain Reformed statements about the divine will and the doctrine
of the Trinity because in his view they are liable to being read as contradictions of God's
simplicity (*Loci Theologici*, loc. 2, cap. 8, sect. 3, 131, p. 306).
[55] Johann Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1715), pars 1, cap.
8, qu. 5, sect. 2, 13, p. 446. For Quenstedt's treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum*,
with comments on the implications for theology proper, see *Theologia Didactico-
Polemica*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1715), pars 3, cap. 3, memb. 1, sect. 1, pp. 132-5.
[56] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:22.

Pedro Fonseca (1528-1599).[57] Considering the question of distinction in relation to the

divine attributes, Maccovius (1588-1644), an early orthodox Dutch theologian who

taught at Franeker, acknowledges that God 'is occupied about diverse objects and effects

diverse things' but, unlike Thomas, does not emphasize that there is therefore an

extramental basis for the distinctions among the attributes and states only that the

attributes are distinct not *ex natura Dei* but *ex ratione et modo nostro concipiendi*.[58]

Thus, even in the cadre of Reformed scholastics whose works influence the present study,

there is some degree of philosophical and theological diversity, to say nothing of the

those who, later in the orthodox period, appropriated Cartesian philosophy and took

matters in a rationalist direction in conflict with the common orthodox appropriation of

Thomas and Aristotle.[59]

      Nevertheless, this lack of strict uniformity in Reformed orthodoxy does not take

away the fact that, with many of its theologians, there is a broad continuation of

Thomistic (and Aristotelian) patterns of thinking in dogmatic elucidation of biblical

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[57] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 29, pp. 232-47. On applying this discussion to the issue of the distinctions among the divine attributes, Alsted clearly favors a Thomistic approach.

[58] Johannes Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici*, *editio postrema*, ed. Nicolai Arnoldi (Amsterdam, 1658), cap. 15, p. 121. However, as Muller notes (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:297), the apparently nominalist character of such a statement may be simply a function of brevity in certain treatments of the attributes and is not opposed *per se* to recognition of a *distinctio virtualis* or *distinctio per eminentiam*.

[59] See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:121-29. Muller lists Descartes, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Leibniz, Hobbes, and Spinoza as those whose thinking challenged the Aristotelian philosophical framework. In Muller's review of the history, the philosophical tensions centered around issues such as the use of reason in demonstrating the existence of God, the role of *concursus* in the doctrine of providence, and the concept of substance. For orthodox critiques of these philosophical innovations, see, e.g., Gisbert Voetius, *Renati Des Cartes Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (Amsterdam, 1654); Peter van Mastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianiarum Gangraena* (Amsterdam, 1677).

teaching in the doctrine of God. It may be beneficial to ponder two test cases here, one of

which is the question of the distinctions among the attributes. The Reformed authors in

view repudiate the Scotist assertion of formal distinctions among the attributes in God

himself and yet also contend that Ockham's description of the attributes is inadequate.

Born less than a decade after Calvin, the Strasbourg and Heidelberg theologian Zanchi

(1516-1590) discusses the distinctions among the attributes of God from a decidedly

Thomistic angle, taking up the distinction between the light and heat of the sun as an

analogue: light and heat are predicated of the sun not merely because it *effects* these but

also because *in virtute* it *is* these (though in a unified manner superior to the way in

which things in the world are illuminated or hot).[60] Zanchi's description thus

recapitulates Thomas' notion that the perfections of creatures pre-exist in singularity in

God and commends the *distinctio virtualis*. Citing Thomas and Cajetan, the early

orthodox philosopher and theologian Keckermann (1571-1608) likewise commends the

distinctio virtualis and *distinctio eminens*.[61]

Polanus (1561-1610), who taught at Basel and makes a number of appearances in

Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, states that God's 'essential properties' are distinguished

neither *realiter* nor *ex natura rei* (contra Duns Scotus) but *ratione* or 'in our mode of

understanding'. Yet, he adds, *ratione* is said ambiguously, for Ockham and Gabriel Biel

(wrongly) argue that the *distinctio rationalis* requires its terms to have only *esse*

objectivum seu imaginarium, while the Thomistic outlook (rightly) posits that in the

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[60] Jerome Zanchi, *De Natura Dei, seu de Divinis Attributis, Libri V* (Neostadium, 1598), lib. 1, cap. 8, p. 19. See Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 4, pp. 144-6, with Cajetan's commentary, where the language of 'virtue' and 'eminence' is found.
[61] Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Systema Logica*, in *Operum Omnium Quae Extant, Tomus Primus* (Geneva, 1614), lib. 1, cap. 5, p. 675.

distinctio rationalis our intellect simply apprehends God with diverse names (e.g., mercy, justice) whose definitions have different content.[62] Though Polanus does not identify here the abiding objective basis for the distinctions among the attributes in a Thomistic account, the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie* figure Voetius (1589-1676) writes that the diverse effects of God's action in the economy serve as the *fundamentum* for a *distinctio virtualis* or *eminens*. This even includes the *distinctio formalis*, though *non actu* (against Duns Scotus) *sed virtute*. Because these effects adventitiously impress upon the mind the distinction between one attribute and another, the *distinctio rationalis* is not only a *distinctio rationis ratiocinantis* but also a *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*.[63]

A second test case that displays the broad appropriation of Thomas' thinking is the question of the sense in which God's attributes are ascribed to him. These Reformed scholastics do not champion an *analogia entis*, for, in Polanus' words, God is infinite and 'does not admit a created similitude of himself'.[64] Further, God's infinite being has no proportion to the (finite) created intellect, and the created intellect is not conformable to God's infinite being.[65] Nevertheless, because the creature is ordered to God as its

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[62] Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanoviae, 1615), lib. 2, cap. 7, p. 141. Strictly speaking, this rejection of Ockham and Biel opposes only their formal presentation of the nature of the *distinctio rationalis*. However, this rejection is designed to take the reader beyond the notion of a mere nominal diversity among the divine attributes and to legitimize the Thomistic approach.

[63] Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum, Pars Prima* (Utrecht, 1648), disp. 13, pp. 233-4.

[64] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 10, p. 144.

[65] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 3, pp. 33-4. Muller observes the presence of this 'Scotist and nominalist realization of the inaccessibility and unknowability of God apart from revelation' in Reformed orthodoxy and comments that, with the ontological and epistemological axiom *finitum non est capax infiniti*, the Reformed theologians carry out their various programs 'after the collapse of the *analogia entis*' (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume One: Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], p.

efficient and final cause (Rom. 11:36), it partakes of God's perfections in a derivative,

finite manner and so in one sense still enjoys some faint similitude or *analogia* to God.

As to the matter of attribution or predication, this entails that God's attributes, the names

of which are annexed from creaturely description, are predicated of him analogically.[66]

Thus, against Scotus' affirmation of univocity, God's 'communicable' perfections are not

predicated of God and creatures in the same sense. Yet, they are not predicated in a sense

totally diverse with agreement in name only. Therefore, according to Turretin in the high

orthodox period, the perfections are instead predicated analogously – 'principally' of God

and 'participatively' of creatures.[67] This sentiment is echoed later in the orthodox period

by the Dutch theologian Mastricht. He writes that 'between the infinite and the finite,

there is no proportion in any way.' Yet, the attributes are not predicated of God as if they

'concurred only in name'; rather, they belong 'principally and originally' to God and

'participatively and with a grade of diminution' to creatures.[68] Thus, as the question of

the distinctions among the attributes elicits Reformed responses along the general

Thomistic trajectory, so the question of the predicative sense of the attributes brings out

responses aligned with Thomas more than Duns Scotus or Ockham.

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109). For recent discussion about whether Thomas himself was committed to an
analogia entis and about what this concept might in fact mean, see Laurence Paul
Hemming, '*Analogia non Entis sed Entitatis*: The Ontological Consequences of the
Doctrine of Analogy', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (2004), pp. 118-
29; Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the* Summa Theologiae,
Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Surrey: Ashgate, 2006), pp.
115-18, 120n31, 121n49.
[66] Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 10, pp. 28-31. Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae
Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 14, p. 154.
[67] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 6, 4, p. 208.
[68] Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, *editio nova* (Utrecht, 1724), lib. 2,
cap. 5, 7, p. 94.

Turning to divine simplicity in Reformed orthodoxy, we may note at least four features in the formulation of the doctrine. First, a number of species of composition are typically rejected in theology proper. In early orthodoxy, Polanus denies that a composition of bodily parts, matter and form, genus and difference, subject and accident, act and potency, suppositum and nature, existence and essence, or, indeed, any parts whatsoever might be found in God.[69] The delineation is similar in later authors such as Turretin and Mastricht.[70] Second, in the order of knowing, divine simplicity derives from several biblical attributes of God and then is seen to deliver the underlying theological rationale for these attributes. Zanchi, for example, while recognizing that Jesus' statement of God's spirituality in John 4:24 is meant first to promote right worship, argues that it removes from God any composition of integral parts, matter and form, or subject and accidents and declares that God is 'most spiritual, and most simple'. Zanchi also indicates that divine simplicity stems from the divine aseity conveyed in the name of God: 'the simplicity of God from this first is confirmed, that he calls himself Jehova. And he is called Jehova in the first place because he is not only being [*ens*], but essence, from no one, nor by another, but itself and through itself existing.'[71] Thus, Exodus 3:14, together with other texts in which the divine name appears, compels the identification of God with his own essence and existence in the doctrine of divine simplicity.[72] Likewise, Mastricht catalogues a number of divine attributes (spirit, primacy, immutability, incorruptibility, infinity, perfection) that imply and are reinforced by simplicity, with the

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[69] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 142.
[70] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 5, pp. 210-11; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 5, 22, p. 104.
[71] Jerome Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 2, qu. 1, pp. 82-3.
[72] Whether this reading of Exodus 3:14 stands up under exegetical scrutiny is taken up in chapter three below.

intention of demonstrating that simplicity emerges from the work of exegesis. He insists that 'Scripture teaches the simplicity of God; accordingly, it is not a merely philosophical dogma.'[73]

Third, the Reformed theologians continue the invocation of divine simplicity in expounding the doctrine of the Trinity, which, as we have seen, is a habit of theological reasoning that begins in the patristic period. Aware of the challenges of Socinianism and Unitarianism in the British context, Owen (1616-1683) asserts that trinitarian teaching must contend fundamentally that 'there is one God; that this God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and so, that the Father is God, so is the Son, so is the Holy Ghost.' The divine nature is 'absolutely singular and one' and cannot be divided or multiplied even as it is communicable or attributable to more than one. The divine nature of the three is 'the same absolutely in and unto each of them'; the 'whole divine nature' is in each person. Indeed, each divine person is 'nothing but the divine essence…subsisting in an especial manner'. Each person, then, 'hath not its own distinct substance' but rather 'hath distinctly its own substance'.[74] With such statements, Owen repels both tritheism and essential subordination in the Godhead. Turretin's account of the Trinity also assumes the importance of divine simplicity. Simplicity and the Trinity are mutually informing, and the resultant *distinctio realis minor* or *distinctio modalis* between essence and person and between one divine person and another defuses both Sabellianism and Tritheism.[75]

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[73] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 24, pp. 104-5.

[74] John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, in vol. 2 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), pp. 379, 407-11.

[75] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, 27, 9-11, pp. 307-8.

Fourth, never far from the concerns of piety, the Reformed orthodox sketch the manner in which God's simplicity is instructive for the Christian life. Mastricht's account of the practical implications first draws attention to the utter perfection of God and to the fact that he is the *radix omnis perfectionis* to be praised by his creatures. Second, Mastricht writes, the integrity of God and the inseparability of his attributes encourage wholehearted trust in him on our part. Third, God's simplicity stipulates that Christians should approach the service of God with sincerity and purity of heart, avoiding the 'double-souled' life mentioned in James 1:8. Fourth, that sincerity and purity of heart must carry over into interaction with other human beings. Fifth, and finally, in his simplicity, God is unchangeable and reliable – *quo simplicior, eo solidior* – which is heartening for believers.[76]

D.   **Modern Criticisms and Revisions**

Despite its presence in patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation Protestant orthodox theology, divine simplicity falls into general disfavor in the modern period. In the seventeenth century itself there are foreshadowings of this shift. For example, the Remonstrants' confession of faith omits divine simplicity, and, in the *Apologia* for the confession, it is said that 'concerning this [*simplicitas*] not an iota indeed is in Scripture. Then this dispute is all metaphysical.' In addition to characterizing the doctrine as a purely metaphysical concern, the *Apologia* asks whether divine simplicity coheres with the freedom of God's will and action. For, if God's

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[76] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 25-29, pp. 105-7.

essence, which is necessary and always remains the same, is identical with his will and action, then the latter too are apparently necessary.[77]

After the dwindling of Protestant scholastic theology in the eighteenth century, such questions about the theological pedigree of divine simplicity and about its coherence with other Christian claims eventually appear in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lutheran circles with theologians like Isaak Dorner (1809-1884), Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), and Adolf Harnack (1851-1930), and in Reformed circles with theologians like Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Barth (1886-1968), and Emil Brunner (1889-1966). However, while these theologians still read and assess the seventeenth-century Lutheran and Reformed accounts of God's simplicity, the works of others such as Spinoza (1632-1677) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) generate certain concerns and presuppositions with which the Protestant orthodox texts are read.

On the one hand, Spinoza's treatment of simplicity includes a number of statements that can be harmonized with standard Christian formulations. He writes that, if God were composed of parts, then the parts composing would stand prior in nature to God and would have the power of establishing (*vis dandi*) God's perfections. On the other hand, however, he argues that the divine attributes are distinct *tantum ratione* and, indeed, that they are not truly to be distinguished (*nec illa revera inter se distingui*).[78] Spinoza's conception of infinity also militates against distinctions in God and, moreover, elides the distinction between God and other beings: while an infinite *suo genere* can be

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[77] *Apologia pro Confessione sive Declaratione Sententiae eorum, Qui in Foederato Belgio vocantur Remonstrantes, super praecipuis Articulis Religionis Christianae* (1630), cap. 2, p. 41. The *Apologia* is attributed to the Arminian theologian Simon Episcopius.
[78] Benedict de Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaphysica*, in vol. 1 of *Opera*, electronic ed., ed. Carl Gebhardt (Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 2008), pars 2, cap. 5, pp. 258-9.

demarcated from other essences, 'whatever is absolutely infinite…involves no negation.'[79] For Spinoza, there is but one substance in existence (i.e., God), and all else is a *modus* or *affectio* in God (i.e., 'that which is in another by which it is also conceived').[80]

Schleiermacher's doctrine of God also has a subjectivist impulse in mapping the divine attributes. He posits that '[a]ll attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to him.' In dogmatic theology, 'each one of [the attributes] must express something in God not expressed by the others; and if the knowledge is appropriate to the object, then, as the knowledge is composite, the object too must be composite.' Yet Schleiermacher adds that 'this differentiation can correspond to nothing real in God.' The attributes 'are only meant to explain the feeling of absolute dependence'. When Schleiermacher affirms divine simplicity, he does not consider it a divine attribute in its own right. With unity and infinity, simplicity has 'no dogmatic content' because it does not assert anything about God-consciousness *per se*. Rather, it is 'an attribute of all the divine attributes': 'the unseparated and inseparable mutual inherence of all divine attributes and activities'.[81]

The question of whether attributes like simplicity are merely a product of metaphysics, the move away from objective diversity in treatment of God's perfections, and the spectre of an ultimately abstract and vacuous God yield a number of somewhat

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[79] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethica*, in vol. 2 of *Opera*, electronic ed., ed. Carl Gebhardt (Charlottesville: Intelex Corporation, 2008), pars 1, def. 6, p. 46. Cf. pars 1, prop. 8, pp. 49-51.
[80] Spinoza, *Ethica*, def. 5, p. 45; prop. 14-15, pp. 56-60.
[81] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), §50, 1-4, pp. 194-200; §56, 1, pp. 228-9, 231.

skeptical discussions of divine simplicity on the part of nineteenth-century authors. In

Dorner, there is the formal concern that the doctrine is (at least in part) a capitulation to

the sensibilities of Greek metaphysics and therefore fails to attend to the particularities of

God's economic activity and revelation. Addressing the matter of the real identity of

God's essence and perfections, Dorner comments that 'the Reformation was not directly

a reformation of Metaphysics or the Doctrine of God, but of the Doctrine of Salvation'

and left theology proper to be 'cultivated independently of the Reformation'.[82] Hesitant

about Gerhard's identification of each attribute with the divine essence itself, Dorner

maintains that the diversity of the attributes is 'swallowed up' in a 'unity unattainable by

us'. Indeed, 'if that by which one attribute is distinguished from another is abolished in

God, the essence of that attribute is abolished, and what remains is, regarded as an idea,

not something higher, but something lower – wholly indefinite existence.'[83] Here the

criticism of Spinoza and Schleiermacher appears, with Dorner leveling the charge that the

confusion of infinity with indefiniteness means either that one cannot 'draw the precise

distinction between God and the world' or that the 'Deity' will be 'absolutely

incognizable, in a deistic position of transcendence'.[84] At the same time, Dorner denies

that God is a composite. Framing divine simplicity (*Einfachheit*) as a corollary of the

ontological argument for God's existence, Dorner parses God's simplicity as his 'self-

identity' and hopes that simplicity might be 'lifted above a purely negative meaning' 'by

the interposition of the plurality of the attributes', which would then account for the

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[82] I. A. Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 1, trans. Alfred Cave (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1880), p. 196.
[83] Dorner, *System of Christian Doctrine*, p. 197.
[84] Dorner, *System of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 198-9.

diversity in created reality.[85] Accordingly, Dorner does not abandon the doctrine of

divine simplicity altogether, but he does urge that it should account for the richness of

God's being and should cohere with the fact that God is the source of all created

diversity.

Without opposing divine simplicity *per se*, Ritschl's essay *Theology and*

Metaphysics problematizes theology's use of metaphysical concepts. Arguing that even

the most sophisticated Hellenic philosophers proffer only a concept of God as a ground

and correlate of the world, Ritschl remarks that, 'if a Christian commits himself to

metaphysical knowledge of God he thereby relinquishes his Christian orientation and

moves to a position corresponding in general to the level of paganism. For paganism

asserts as divine, entities which in the judgment of Christians properly belong to the

world.'[86]

> While it is understandable that one would make use of metaphysical concepts,
> assigning to them the highest priority in systematic theology, if he understands the
> task of systematic theology to be the harmonization of Christian revelation, that
> is, the Christian world view, with that comprehensive secular world view which is
> thought to be preeminent because it claims to be both universal and rational. But
> the preceding discussion has shown that such an attempt in systematic theology is,
> by its very nature, a rationalistic misuse of reason in theology which diminished
> the value of the knowledge of God that we obtain from revelation.[87]

Though an heir to traditional Presbyterian theology, Hodge blends the two

concerns about divine simplicity being an unfortunate product of metaphysical

speculation and about it undermining the authenticity of the various divine attributes

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[85] Dorner, *System of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 230-8.

[86] Albrecht Ritschl, *Theology and Metaphysics*, in *Three Essays*, trans. Philip Hefner
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 157-8. As discussed below, the concern about
effectively locating God within the created order is a valid one in the use of metaphysical
concepts.

[87] Ritschl, *Theology and Metaphysics*, p. 170.

revealed in Scripture. On the one hand, Hodge writes, God cannot be conceived as a composite 'composed of different elements'. On the other hand, 'to say…that the divine attributes differ only in name, or in our conceptions, or in their effects, is to destroy all true knowledge of God.' Moving in the direction of univocity, he remarks, 'Knowledge is no more identical with power in God than it is in us.'[88] In weighing the *distinctio virtualis* posited for the divine attributes in older accounts, Hodge argues,

> If this be understood to mean that the divine perfections are really what the Bible declares them to be; that God truly thinks, feels, and acts; that He is truly wise, just, and good…that He can hear and answer prayer; it may be admitted. But we are not to give up the conviction that God is really in Himself what He reveals Himself to be, to satisfy any metaphysical speculations as to the difference between essence and attribute in an infinite Being.[89]

If there must be a choice between the risk of lowering God to the plane of created being and the risk of 'denying Him as He is revealed', 'the latter danger is by far the greater of the two.'[90]

In his *History of Dogma*, Harnack perpetuates the notion that attributes like simplicity emerge from misguided metaphysical reasoning about God. He sets out to narrate 'an acute secularising of Christianity' in which both Gnostic and early catholic Christians transform the gospel into a full-orbed metaphysical system in order to legitimize Christianity in the world of Greco-Roman thought. In the incremental, 'indulgent remodelling' of the Christian religion in catholic theology, the faith unwittingly succumbs to the conceptual matrices and speculations of Hellenistic

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[88] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), pp. 371-2.
[89] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 373-4.
[90] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p. 374.

philosophy.[91]   On the one hand, the church conserves the importance of the Old

Testament and the gospel and yet, on the other hand, the bygone themes and

controversies of the apostolic period are virtually unintelligible to 'Gentile Christians' of

subsequent centuries, requiring the church, like Hellenistic Judaism, to accommodate

itself to 'the Greek spirit'.[92]   Some 'fundamental ideas of the Gospel' 'have defied all

attacks', but the history of dogma provides 'the very best means and methods of freeing

the Church from dogmatic Christianity, and of hastening the inevitable process of

emancipation'.[93]   For Harnack, the dogmatic transformation of Christianity encompasses

divine attributes like simplicity.[94]

Harnack's Dutch contemporary Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) is a rare example

of a theologian at the turn of the twentieth century who unreservedly affirms a traditional

doctrine of divine simplicity, rejects the claim that it is a 'metaphysical' teaching, and

distinguishes it from the indefiniteness of God in authors like Spinoza and Hegel. He

writes that

> the simplicity of God is absolutely not a metaphysical abstraction. It is essentially
> distinct from the philosophical idea of absolute being, the One, the only One, the
> Absolute, or substance, terms by which Xenophanes, Plato, Philo, Plotinus, and
> later Spinoza and Hegel designated God. It is not found by abstraction, that is, by
> eliminating all the contrast and distinctions that characterize creatures and
> describing him as the being who transcends all such contrasts. On the contrary:
> God's simplicity is the end result of ascribing to God all the perfections of
> creatures to the ultimate divine degree.[95]

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[91] Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), pp. 223-8.
[92] Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:15-17, 21, 46-53.
[93] Adolf Harnack, *Outlines of the History of Dogma*, trans. Edwin Knox Mitchell (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), pp. 7-8.
[94] Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 2, trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), p. 349.
[95] Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 176. It is interesting to note that

According to Bavinck, this does not countenance pantheism but in fact emphatically

disavows it by underscoring that God does indeed have a 'distinct and infinite life of his

own within himself'.[96]

The question of whether divine simplicity is merely a metaphysical concept and

the related question of whether it detaches God from the economic revelation of his

attributes persist in Barth's reflection on the subject. Barth wishes to point up elements

of truth in the doctrine of divine simplicity but also upbraids its underlying 'semi-

nominalism'. For Barth, Christian theology proper cannot deal with the attributes of God

as mere 'hypostatised principles' or 'with these attributes or perfections as such, but with

them as His.' '[A]ccording to Scripture, all the glory of God is concentrated, gathered up

and unified in God Himself as the Lord of glory.' The perfections, then, are 'not distinct

from Him but are in fact Himself'.[97] However, Barth stresses the objective 'multiplicity'

and 'individuality' of the perfections and laments that in the theological tradition the

simplicity of God's being is set forth as 'the only true description of that being', while the

multiplicity of the perfections is regarded as 'improper'. Happily, 'the main stream of

theological tradition' does not regard the multiplicity as purely a human construct.

Nevertheless, Barth chides Thomas, Calvin, various Protestant scholastics, and

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Hegel's role in shaping reflection on the doctrine of God appears to be twofold. On the
one hand, he is criticized for developing too thin a conception of God. On the other hand,
his emphasis on divine becoming is taken up and extended in various modern
theologians' accounts of God. On the influence of Hegel in the latter respect, see, e.g.,
Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of
the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 63-100. Jüngel memorably observes the popularity
of divine passibility in the 'newer theology schooled by Luther's Christology and Hegel's
philosophy' (p. 373).
[96] Bavinck, *God and Creation*, p. 177.
[97] Barth, *CD* II/1, pp. 323-6.

Schleiermacher for positing a *fundamentum* in God which underwrites talk of various

attributes and yet never specifying what that *fundamentum* might be.[98]

> Nor could it properly be investigated. For the presupposition stood firm that by
> the being of God must be meant his *essentia* as such, i.e., at bottom His *nuda*
> *essentia*, whose simplicity must be conceptually the first and last and real thing,
> the *proprium*…in comparison with which every other statement can have no
> further value than that of a concession, a purely secondary truth.[99]

That each of the *proprietates* is the *essentia* itself is

> invariably interpreted unfavourably to the *proprietates*, so that in the last resort
> [these] necessarily lose their reality in favour of the *essentia*. For they were
> conceived as rooted, not in the *essentia* as such, but – in spite of occasional
> reservations and occasional happy assertions to the contrary – only in its relation
> to us and our relations to it.[100]

In such theologizing, the doctrine of God is shaped by a 'general conception of God (that

of ancient Stoicism and Neo-Platonism)' rather than the Christian trinitarian conception.

In Barth's judgment, this from the outset sabotages the attempts to develop the rich

diversity of theological description in the Bible. In this setting, the attributes must be

spoken *proprie* of God, but in fact they can be said only *improprie*: 'what had to be

affirmed had already been denied by the whole approach.' This constitutes what Barth

deems the 'partial nominalism of the Thomistic and orthodox Protestant tradition'.[101]

   With Dorner, Barth aims to give an account of simplicity that, in his view, more

closely aligns God's own being with the diversity of attributes shown forth in God's

revelation. He delivers his account under three propositions. First, the multiplicity and

diversity of the perfections belong to the one divine being. The perfections do not add

anything new to God's being: 'God is in essence all that He is. But He is in essence not

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[98] Barth, *CD* II/1, pp. 327-9.
[99] Barth, *CD* II/1, p. 329.
[100] Barth, *CD* II/1, p. 329.
[101] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 329-30.

only one, but multiple, individual, and diverse.'[102] Second, the multiplicity and diversity

belong to God's simple being, 'which is not therefore divided up and then put together

again'.[103] In this way, there is no contradiction between multiplicity and unity:

> Our doctrine therefore means that every individual perfection in God is nothing
> but God Himself and therefore nothing but every other divine perfection. It
> means equally strictly on the other hand that God Himself is nothing other than
> each one of His perfections in its individuality, and that each individual perfection
> is identical with every other and with the fulness of them all.[104]

Committed to the notion that God is 'rich in himself', Barth contends that God's being

'transcends the contrast of *simplicitas* and *multiplicitas*, including and reconciling both',

and therefore must be understood dialectically. Third, the multiple and diverse divine

perfections are rooted, not in God's participation in something other than himself, but

rather in God's own being. Here Barth appreciates the older theologians' insistence that

there are no accidental forms in God, but he hastens to add that, 'owing to the dazzling

effect of the Platonic-Aristotelian idea of being', they are obliged to 'ascribe higher

dignity to the idea of the one as against that of the many'.[105]

Such concerns about divine simplicity are expressed by Brunner too. He judges

that simplicity is 'inevitable if we make the abstract idea of the Absolute the starting-

point for our thought. This is simply the undifferentiated *Monas* of Neo-Platonism

modified by Theism.' For Brunner, when Gerhard, for example, surveys the *usus*

practicus of the attribute, his explanation reveals that he is 'dealing with a speculative

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[102] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 330-1
[103] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 332.
[104] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 333.
[105] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 333-5.

theologumenon [*sic*] or *philosophumenon*, which has nothing at all to do with the God of the Christian Faith'.[106]

The two primary criticisms of God's simplicity that are traced here both center around the claim that this attribute bifurcates God's essence and God's economic action and revelation. There is the first question about the properly theological (rather than merely metaphysical) provenance of such an attribute. There is then the question about whether simplicity postulates an undue homogeneity in God's essence that divests God of his immanent richness and also denigrates God's revelation of his attributes, thereby fostering nominalism. These two critiques are mutually reinforcing, and they persist in more recent discussion as well.

E.   Recent Discussions

i.   Theological Misgivings

It is somewhat artificial but perhaps heuristically permissible to transition from speaking of 'modern' readings of divine simplicity to speaking of those which occur in the wake of Barth as more 'recent' readings. At this point, it is worth observing that, among Lutherans (Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, Jüngel) and Reformed theologians (T. F. Torrance, Moltmann, Colin Gunton) in twentieth-century systematic theology, divine simplicity is sometimes treated only briefly or indirectly. There is a sense that the attribute may still contain some useful insight, but, due to the objections raised in modern

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[106] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), pp. 293-4.

theology, the attribute is sometimes regarded as but a relic of the Christian past.[107]

Nevertheless, even when the material covered here appears to be only tangentially related to the doctrine of divine simplicity, it has in its inner logic significant implications for the doctrine. As in earlier modern authors, a traditional conception of divine simplicity faces the objection that it is a metaphysical notion out of place in Christian theology. Likewise, there is again the objection that it bifurcates God's essence and his economic disclosure of his many attributes, evacuating God's essence of its variegated richness, undermining or even falsifying God's revelation, and encouraging nominalist projection as to what might lie within the hiddenness of God's essence. In addition, concerns are voiced as to the propriety of calling God *actus purus* and permitting divine simplicity to regulate the kinds of distinctions to be registered among the three divine persons.

First, there is the persistent criticism that divine simplicity and other similar attributes are the result of deference to Greek metaphysics. Torrance faults a 'metaphysical conception of the inertial Nature or Being of God' and favors a 'powerful soteriological approach' to the doctrine of God that yields at least a qualified affirmation of divine passibility.[108] Moltmann picks out the cross of Christ as 'the foundation and criticism of Christian theology', and he sets out to examine 'what this human cross of Christ means for God'. Among other things, it means that the 'Aristotelian, philosophical theology' present in the church's tradition must be abandoned: 'God's essential apathy' must give way to 'the passion of the passionate God'.[109] Replacing 'metaphysics' with

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[107] In some cases (e.g., Jenson), simplicity is not treated at length because of a conscious choice not to enumerate and expound the attributes in a traditional format.
[108] Thomas F. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 246-50.
[109] Moltmann, *Crucified God*, p. x.

'the history of God, whose nucleus is the cross', Moltmann seeks to '[break] the spell of

the Aristotelian doctrine of God' with the notion of God's 'active suffering' in which, as

love (1 John 4:8, 16), God 'constitutes his existence in the event of his love', 'in the event

of the cross'.[110]

Pannenberg initially presents a rather different assessment of the relationship

between metaphysics and Christian theology. Looking to the past to move beyond the

'end of metaphysics' in modern theological discourse, Pannenberg writes,

> In proclaiming the one God, Christianity appealed almost from the start to
> philosophy and to its criticism of the polytheistic beliefs of other peoples….Such
> an appeal to the philosophical doctrine of God must not be interpreted only in an
> external sense as an accommodation to the spiritual climate of Hellenism.
> Instead, it reflects the condition for the possibility that non-Jews, without
> becoming Jews, might come to believe in the God of Israel as the one God of all
> humanity. The appeal to the philosophers' teachings concerning the one God was
> the condition for the emergence of a Gentile church at all. We must therefore
> conclude that the connection between Christian faith and Hellenistic
> thought…does not represent a foreign infiltration into the original Christian
> message, but rather belongs to its very foundations.[111]

Nevertheless, Pannenberg states, one cannot claim that (especially earlier) patristic

engagement with Hellenistic metaphysics 'as a whole succeeded in carrying out a

definitive critical revision in the encounter of the Judaeo-Christian testimony to God with

philosophy'. Therefore, '[t]he negative judgment of Harnack retains a limited

justification to this extent.' 'The ideas of God as a world principle and as the free Lord

of history remained for the most part inharmoniously alongside each other,' and '[i]t

remains the task of theology…to rework every remnant that has not been recast.'[112]

Commitment to the biblical notion of God's freedom to act anew in the world ought to

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[110] Moltmann, *Crucified God*, pp. 218, 230, 244.

[111] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The End of Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip
Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 11-12.

[112] Pannenberg, 'Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God', pp. 179-83.

have shored up God's otherness such that attributes like immutability, eternity, and simplicity would come in for significant revision. With regard to simplicity, while the 'world-ground' in its 'distant generality' in Greek thought can be construed in 'abstract propertylessness', the God of Scripture who acts in 'contingent events with a concrete meaning for the men participating in it' 'assumes properties into his eternal essence through such deeds in that he chooses these and no other events as the form of his contingent operation'.[113]

Like Pannenberg, Jenson explicitly rejects the thesis that the church fathers exchanged the gospel for Hellenistic philosophy: 'The fathers did not, as is still often supposed, hellenize the evangel; they labored to evangelize their own antecedent Hellenism, and succeeded remarkably if not fully.' Yet Jenson couches a number of criticisms of the fathers' understanding of God in terms of the Hellenization charge. He faults Augustine for tolerating unresolved tensions between 'the metaphysical principles of the Greeks and the storytelling of the gospel'. Augustine of course believed the gospel as 'a story of temporal events' but was at the same time bound to resist 'temporal contamination of God'. Thus, Jenson regards the fathers' doctrine of divine impassibility as a matter of 'pagan antiquity's metaphysical prejudice'.[114]

In Jüngel's narration, classical theology proper is afflicted with an insidious metaphysical conception of God that must be overcome with the concept of the death of God. In 'the basic Aristotelian decision' about being, actuality precedes potency and possibility, which are regarded as 'deficiency in reality', but '[i]t is the intellectual task

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[113] Pannenberg, 'Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God', p. 181.
[114] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1, The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 90, 95, 112, 234.

assigned to the Christian faith to take leave of this concept of God.' The 'axiom of

absoluteness', the 'axiom of immutability', and the 'axiom of apathy' are 'unsuitable

axioms for the Christian concept of God' and are supplanted by God's identification with

the man Jesus.[115] In his *Act and Being*, Gunton reacts against the divine attributes being

conceived 'largely cosmologically' or 'in terms of timeless relations between the eternal

and the temporal, to the exclusion of attributes suggested by divine action in time'.

Gunton wishes to focus more on God's work in the economy as the setting in which God

enables us to glimpse his attributes and wishes therefore 'to commend a more strongly

narrative approach to the topic, seeking to save theology from an a priori definition in the

interests of a doctrine in which being and act are brought into a more successful harmony

than appears often to have been the case.'[116]

Second, there is the concern that divine simplicity drives a wedge between God's

essence and his economic action and revelation. Taking up Barth's emphasis on the

particularity of God's self-revelation – over against (putatively) generic accounts of

God's being – as the norm for Christian theology proper, Torrance urges, 'According to

the Christian Gospel, then, there is and can be no other God than this God whose very

Being is the One who loves us and will not be without us, for the Being of God and the

Activity of God in loving may not be separated….God is who he is in the Act of his

revelation, and his Act is what it is in his Being.' There is no God 'behind the back of

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[115] Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, pp. 191, 195, 199, 209-10, 213-14, 339, 373.
[116] Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 17-18, 96.

Jesus Christ'.[117] Without explicitly mentioning divine simplicity at this point, Torrance

exemplifies the stress on essence-economy alignment in recent systematic theology.

Pannenberg's effort to take into account God's 'assumption' of properties in time

is an attempt 'to spare the Christian doctrine of God from the gap between the

incomprehensible *essence* and the historical *action* of God, by virtue of which each

threatens to make the other impossible'.[118] When he addresses in his *Systematic*

Theology the relationship between the unity of God's essence and the multiplicity of

God's attributes, Pannenberg reasons,

> If we try to trace the back the multiplicity of the qualities that are attributed to
> God…to the multiplicity of his outward relations, and in this way to rescue the
> unity of the divine essence, there follows not only an abstract and empty notion of
> the essence but even more fatefully a fundamental contradiction in the idea of
> God that has destructive consequences for the whole concept of God. This inner
> contradiction is that God is not to be really distinguished from his attributes but is
> to be distinguished from the functions that form the stuff of his attributes as
> something that stands behind them.[119]

This gives rise to the 'projection hypothesis', which, as in Feuerbach and others, reduces

characterizations of God to 'projection of human limitations and experience into the

divine essence.[120] Along these lines, Jüngel's retooling of divine simplicity construes it

as a *multiplex simplicitas* in which there is a *distinctio realis* between each of the

attributes. God's simplicity, then, is 'the living concentration of the inexhaustibly diverse

characteristics of God, comparable to the character of a fire that burns in countless many

flames'.[121] In Gunton's program for the doctrine of the divine attributes, God's

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[117] Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 4-5, 206, 243.
[118] Pannenberg, 'Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God', p. 181.
[119] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:362-3.
[120] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:363.
[121] Eberhard Jüngel, 'Theses on the Relation of the Existence, Essence, and Attributes of
God', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 17 (2001), pp. 56, 66.

simplicity becomes a potential hindrance to sketching the 'variety and richness' of the

attributes. Nevertheless, there is still a place for the doctrine inasmuch as it serves to

point up the 'unity and coherence of the divine being'.[122] There are various 'divine ways

of acting' with various attributes following thereon, but, rooted in the 'simplicity' of the

triune and holy love of God, those attributes – and this is the 'point of the doctrine' –

'must be defined from and through one another'.[123]

The interest in aligning God's essence with his activity in the economy gives rise

the recent proposal of Bruce McCormack concerning the relationship between the Trinity

and the divine act of election, which is taken to be shorthand for God's eternal self-

determination to be for us in the covenant of grace. McCormack argues that God's

essence (with his triunity) is not 'an independent "something" that stands behind all

God's acts and relations' but is rather 'given in the act of electing and is, in fact,

constituted by that eternal act'.[124] In jettisoning an 'essentialist' ontology in favor of this

'actualist' ontology, McCormack urges that there could be no God apart from his

decision to take on human flesh and suffer in the person of Christ.[125] Indeed, to say

otherwise is, in McCormack's view, to undermine the full deity of Christ.[126] In

McCormack's work, then, the coherence of God's essence and economic action is sought

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[122] Gunton, *Act and Being*, pp. 31-2.

[123] Gunton, *Act and Being*, pp. 122-3.

[124] Bruce L. McCormack, 'Grace and Being', in John Webster (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 98-9.

[125] Bruce L. McCormack, 'Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010), pp, 218-19.

[126] Bruce L. McCormack, 'Seek God Where He May Be Found A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007), pp. 68, 79. See also Bruce L. McCormack, 'Let's Speak Plainly: A Response to Paul Molnar', *Theology Today* 67 (2010), p. 59.

by stipulating that the economy is, in an anticipatory manner, 'constitutive' of God's being.[127]

Third, there is the concern that calling God *actus purus* renders him inert and incapable of the divine suffering and, in the eyes of some, the divine self-development depicted in Scripture. Though he does not hold that the immanent Trinity is constituted by the economic Trinity, when Torrance comes to the question of divine impassibility, he writes, 'The unqualified Deity of Christ means that his incarnate life…falls within the life of God, and that his passion belongs to the very being of God.' Torrance is appreciative of Cyril of Alexandria's enhypostatic Christology, which stresses that it is the divine Son himself who has assumed a human nature and suffered in the flesh, but Torrance goes beyond this in venturing that 'Christ *as God*…suffered for us and our salvation.' This is the work of God in 'active suffering' whereby he overcomes our suffering. Hence a

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[127] McCormack, 'Grace and Being', pp. 99-100. Kevin Hector ('God's Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 [2005], p. 249n6) carefully observes that McCormack acknowledges the existence of the *Logos asarkos* but rejects the existence of a *Logos absconditus*. For criticisms of McCormack's project, see, Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2002), pp. 61-4; 'The Trinity, Election and God's Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin W. Hector', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), pp. 294-306; 'Can the Electing God be God without Us? Some Implications of Bruce McCormack's Understanding of Barth's Doctrine of Election for the Doctrine of the Trinity', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49 (2007), pp. 199-222; 'Can Jesus' Divinity be Recognized as "Definitive, Authentic and Essential" if it is Grounded in Election? Just how far did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?', *Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 52 (2010), pp. 40-81; Edwin Chr. van Driel, 'Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007), pp. 45-61; George Hunsinger, 'Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth', *Modern Theology* 24 (2008), pp. 179-98.

'soteriological' approach to the doctrine of God generates at least a qualified affirmation of divine passibility and (implicitly) an affirmation of passive potency in God.[128]

Moltmann intensifies this theme, positing that God constitutes himself as God in his suffering with and in the world: 'the history of Christ is the inner life of God himself.'[129] Jüngel likewise insists that in God's 'identification with the Crucified One' 'this event *moves* the eternal being of God…to a self-definition.' Speaking favorably of Hegel's notion of divine development, Jüngel remarks, 'Good Friday belongs to this divine *curriculum vitae*.'[130] God's essence consists in the work of confronting the peril of non-being and in this sense God's essence is identical with his existence.[131] This identification of essence and existence is not meant to promulgate God's simplicity as in the Thomistic perspective but rather to enable God's activity in history to constitute what God is.

Fourth, and finally, there is the concern that the doctrine of divine simplicity stifles adequate differentiation of the three divine persons. In Torrance's configuration of the divine being and the divine persons, he repeats several times that the simple and 'whole' Godhead is indivisibly present in each person but often chooses to describe the unity of God's being just in terms of *koinōnia*, or the 'unity of his coinherent trinitarian relations'.[132] In Moltmann's trinitarianism, however, reticence about the simplicity of the essence appears in stark terms. He reprimands reflection on the Trinity that conceives of

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[128] Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 246-50.
[129] Moltmann, *Crucified God*, pp. 245-6, 249, 255.
[130] Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, pp. x, 76, 221, 371.
[131] Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, pp. 100-1, 159, 184-92, 209, 217, 219-20, 313-14.
[132] Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 29, 115, 124, 130, 132, 141-2, 145, 174, 190.

the persons as *modi essendi*, which characterization of the persons traditionally does not

apportion the divine intellect, love, or will to the three persons and is therefore amiable to

the notion of divine simplicity. According to Moltmann, the persons' interactivity and

'at-oneness', which is open to the inclusion of creatures, cannot occur on 'merely a modal

differentiation' but 'presupposes the personal self-differentiation of God'.[133]

In Jenson's critique of Augustine, simplicity is handled largely as an impediment

to a robust trinitarianism. Whereas 'Nicea asserts eventful differentiation in God,'

Augustine's 'antecedent Platonic theology' stipulates that 'God is metaphysically simple'

and hence precludes 'temporal distinctions' or 'narrative differentiations' in God that, in

Jenson's view, are crucial to the doctrine of the Trinity.[134] Gunton too regards divine

simplicity as a liability for Augustinian (and, more broadly, Western) thought. Augustine

so amplifies the unity of the divine *substantia* and its freedom from accidents that the

three persons can fit into the doctrine of God only 'uncomfortably'. Caught in a

'dualistic' substance-accident ontology, Augustine is left with only the category of

relation to be assigned to the persons and thus fails to see the persons as 'particular

persons' with 'distinguishable identity' who stand in relation to one another. This yields

that, as the 'substratum' 'underlying' the persons, the divine essence features as the 'all-

embracing oneness of God' into which the persons in modalistic fashion are dissolved.[135]

With the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, Gunton opts for the 'ontological

achievement' of the Cappadocian fathers in revolutionizing the notion of 'being' so that

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[133] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 13-20, 148-50.
[134] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, p. 111.
[135] Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: T & T Clark, 1997), pp. 38-42.

'there is no "being" of God other than this dynamic of persons in relation.'[136] Even so, Gunton still attempts a 'positive construal' of divine simplicity 'in terms of perichoresis'. Parts are separable but the divine persons remain in 'perfect and unbroken communion' and 'therefore constitute a "simple" God'. Simplicity, then, is 'a function of the doctrine of God's triune and holy love'.[137]

In sum, in the writings of major modern and contemporary theologians on the matter of divine simplicity, several persistent themes emerge. First, there is the methodological concern that, instead of deferring to the economic and biblical portrayal of God, divine simplicity bows the knee to Hellenistic philosophy and loses sight of certain material hallmarks of Christian theology proper. Second, divine simplicity requires of God's essence a homogeneity that hollows out God's immanent variety and richness. This renders the essence aloof and relegates the diversity of the attributes to the sphere of the human mind, encouraging nominalism and subjective projections about God in theology proper. In so cloaking and obscuring the essence, simplicity bifurcates God's essence and his actions and attributes. Third, to some, God as *actus purissimus* entails a divine inertia that stifles his involvement in the economy whereby (it is sometimes believed) he actualizes himself and constitutes his own identity. Fourth, and finally, there is concern that simplicity suppresses the requisite distinctions among the divine persons.

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[136] Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 10. See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1985). Against the popular narrative opposing Eastern and Western trinitarianism, see Michel René Barnes, 'De Régnon Reconsidered', *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995), pp. 51–79; 'Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), pp. 237–50. Lewis Ayres (*Augustine and the Trinity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], p. 1) writes that this narrative, in which Augustine is viewed as 'the initiator of disastrous trends in Western Christian thought', has been discredited by recent studies of Augustine's theology.

[137] Gunton, *Act and Being*, pp. 122-3.

If it is emphasized that the divine *hypostaseis* cannot be just relations, then simplicity can be viewed as that which prevents the *hypostaseis* from coming into their own as persons who are not mere relations but rather *in relation*. In addition, if it is posited that the fundamental unity in God is a matter of the communion and perichoretic harmony of the three persons, then simplicity seems to be a superfluous corroboration of God's oneness. These considerations will be addressed at different points in what follows, but first we turn to the realm of analytic philosophy to take note of another contemporary set of discussions about God's simplicity.

ii.   Analytic Criticisms and Defenses

The analytic interest in theology proper has given rise to several criticisms, defenses, and reworkings of divine simplicity. In the analytic corpus, there are at least five distinguishable objections to this attribute, all of which concern its logical viability and its coherence with other Christian claims about God. First, there is the objection that it is profoundly untoward to assert that God is identical with a property or properties.[138] This objection, which turns on the sense that the identification of God with his properties effectively depersonalizes God, is laid down in Plantinga's Aquinas Lecture at Marquette University in 1980, published in the small book *Does God Have a Nature?*. Plantinga states that Christians believe God to be 'the first being of the universe' and 'a being of incomparable greatness'. That greatness includes God's aseity and sovereignty and his place as the 'uncreated creator of all things'. However, the realm of 'abstract objects' –

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[138] Significantly, the tendency is to use the language of 'properties', a phenomenon that will receive comment below.

universals, properties, propositions, and so on – seems to be both eternal and independent of God. The question of how these relate to God prompts the question of how God's own properties relate to God. If it is 'up to God' whether he should possess these properties, then his aseity and sovereignty are upheld, but at the expense of his having a determinate divine nature. If it is not 'up to God', then his aseity and sovereignty seem to be attenuated in some way.[139] Plantinga recognizes the identity of God with his own nature and attributes as a potential way forward to avoid the horns of the dilemma and to uphold the 'sovereignty-aseity intuition'. However, he regards the identity of God with his nature and properties as a 'dark saying indeed': 'it is difficult to see why anyone would be inclined to accept it.'[140] For, 'if God is identical with each of his properties, then, since each of his properties is a property, he is a property – a self-exemplifying property.' But this obliterates God's personality and personal action: 'If God is a property, then he isn't a person but a mere abstract object.' If one posits that God is perhaps a single state of affairs in virtue of which God's being powerful is identical with his being merciful, then, in identifying God with a state of affairs, one still portrays God as an impersonal object.[141]

In response to Plantinga, William Mann argues that, for Thomas, God is not identical to the properties of knowledge *per se*, power *per se*, and so on but rather identical to *his own* knowledge, *his own* power, and so on. He then suggests that God has the maximum 'degree' of such properties and that, at their 'intrinsic maxima', these are identical with one another. Moreover, Mann adds, every person has a 'rich property', a

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[139] Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980, pp. 1-9.
[140] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 27-8.
[141] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 47-53.

'conjunctive property which includes all and only the essential and accidental properties of some individual thing'. Each person is identical with this 'rich property', which removes the novelty from God being identical with his own properties, though in God's case this 'rich property' is 'self-instantiating'.[142] In response to Mann's restatement of divine simplicity, Thomas Morris points out that, if God is identical with just his own instance of a given property, then such a property *per se* still exists beyond God and is something on which God depends.[143] Likewise, Richard Gale notes two versions of divine simplicity (both mentioned here in the exchange between Mann and Morris): the property identity and instance identity versions. The property identity version renders God 'conceptually unfit to be a personal creator of the universe', while the instance identity version 'violates God's absolute aseity and independence, since it conceives of God as instantiating properties and thus as dependent upon them.'[144]

Given the dissonance between the medieval 'identity' claims about God and the sensibilities of contemporary philosophers, Nicholas Wolterstorff's essay on divine simplicity seeks to discern the underlying reasons for these differences. He represents Thomas as quite confident about the fundamental 'theistic identity claims'[145] but rather 'baffled' about how to amalgamate his 'biblical inheritance' and his 'Greek inheritance'. The distinctness of each divine predicate, the notion of divine freedom, and the doctrine

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[142] William E. Mann, 'Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies* 18 (1982), pp. 460-1, 465-8.
[143] Thomas V. Morris, 'On God and Mann: A View of Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies* 21 (1985), pp. 302, 311-17. For Mann's response and attempt at further clarification, see his 'Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris', *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), p. 352.
[144] Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 24-9.
[145] 'God is not distinct from God's essence'; 'God's existence is not distinct from God's essence'; 'God has no property distinct from God's essence.'

of the Trinity all do not fit easily with the claim of simplicity. For Wolterstorff, however, it is in the territory of the theistic identity claims themselves that the contemporary philosopher is likely to experience the greatest bafflement. This is due to medievals and contemporary philosophers working with 'different ontological styles'.[146]

The medievals use a 'constituent ontology' while contemporary thinkers use a 'relation ontology', within which one can (probably) offer only a 'trivial formulation' of simplicity. Under a constituent ontology everything is a 'what-it-is-as-such' and 'does not *have* a certain nature in the way that it has a certain property. It *is* a certain nature.' Creatures are identical with their respective natures even as they also possess various qualities. The real 'mystery about God', that which distinguishes him from creatures, is that he is not only identical with his nature but also does not have additional qualities. On this view, an essence or nature is 'just as concrete as that of which it is the nature'. If a medieval thinker were to talk of something '*having* a nature' it could only mean '*having as one of its constituents*'. In the recent approach to ontology, however, an entity 'having an essence' is shorthand for an entity 'having an essence as one of its properties: exemplifying it'. On this view, an essence or nature is an 'abstract entity'. The medieval view does not automatically make the theistic identity claims 'non-problematic', but 'working in the style of relation ontology automatically makes them problematic.' Relation ontology does not seek to ascertain 'what an entity is *as such*' but rather acknowledges relations between a thing and something it necessarily exemplifies (a property or set of properties that comprise essence), a thing and something it contingently exemplifies (a contingent property), and instances of properties present in things.

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[146] Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity', in *Inquiring about God: Selected Essays, Volume I*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 91-5.

Medieval ontology, Wolterstorff writes, would deem essence in contemporary ontology a mere accident. Though relation ontology denies Platonic self-exemplifying ideals and thus might at first appear somewhat amiable to divine simplicity, in the end God exemplifying (albeit necessarily) a property or set of properties which comprise his essence *prima facie* does not conduce to God's self-sufficiency, an underlying impetus for the doctrine of divine simplicity. Wolterstorff thus concludes that, for contemporary philosophy, Plantinga's question – does God have a nature? – remains a pressing one. If God does not have a nature, he might be a vagrant or a despot; if he does, he cannot be seen as independent.[147]

In a similar vein, Katherin Rogers aims to identify a discrepancy between the medieval and contemporary explorations of the doctrine of God's simplicity and comments that simplicity in the older theologians does not entail an identification of God with a 'property'. For Thomas and others, God does not have, and is not identical with, any properties. Rather, God is 'simply an act', 'fragmented reflections' of which are 'scattered' among finite creatures.[148]

In defense of divine simplicity on this point, Leftow wishes to modify Plantinga's notion of a 'sovereignty-aseity intuition' by pointing up an 'ultimacy assumption' that truly funds the 'identity thesis': God is the ultimate explanation of things who does not depend on things other than himself to be what he is, which means that he must be identical to his own attributes. Accordingly, Plantinga's criticisms of a doctrine of divine simplicity stemming from 'sovereignty-aseity intuition' fail to penetrate to the real root of

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[147] Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity', pp. 100-9.
[148] Katherin Rogers, 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), pp. 166, 170-4, 178-86.

the matter.[149] Leftow also chides Plantinga for offering no reason as to why God's

identity with his properties or attributes renders God an impersonal property, for the

'identity thesis' may not be intended to claim that God is a property or has the features of

a property in exact alignment with how one normally conceives of properties.

> If an identity-statement 'A = B' is true, then where one could have thought there
> to be two subjects of predication, A and B, there is only one. This one has all
> properties A really has and all properties B really has, but may have only a proper
> subset of the attributes A has been thought to have and a proper subset of the
> attributes B has been thought to have. Still, for all that has been said so far, which
> of the attributes A and B have been thought to have that this one thing has
> remains to be determined. If God = God's nature, God has some subset of the
> attributes God is usually thought to have and some subset of the attributes His
> nature is usually thought to have….A God who is identical with His nature may
> have only some abstract-entity features. He may even have none: the claim God =
> God's nature could inform us that that which is identical with God's nature
> exemplifies no attributes previously associated with God's nature. So that God =
> God's nature just does not entail that God has only abstract-entity features, nor
> therefore that He is abstract. Even if the Identity Thesis is true, it does not follow
> that God is any sort of abstract object.[150]

Likewise, William Valicella remarks that to claim that an 'individual' cannot be a

property simply assumes too much about what properties are and therefore begs the

question.[151]

Second, there is the objection that the alleged identity of one of God's properties

with another is problematic. Not surprisingly, the first and second objections here are

intertwined. Hughes, for example, doubts that God's properties could be identical to God

and identical to one another. Even if God's properties are entirely perfect and thus

different from creatures' properties, one still has to say that God is identical to his own

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[149] Brian Leftow, 'Is God an Abstract Object?', *Noûs* 24 (1990), pp. 585-6, 591-3.
[150] Leftow, 'Is God an Abstract Object?', p. 593. See also Leftow's later defense of
simplicity in 'Divine Simplicity', *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006), pp. 365–80.
[151] William F. Valicella, 'Divine Simplicity: A New Defense', *Faith and Philosophy* 11
(1994), pp. 512-13, 517.

goodness, for example. This identifies God with a property, and, 'since God could not be a property of anything else', 'there is some property – God's perfect goodness – which is a property of itself…and is not a property of anything else. But the idea of a property that is its own and only its own property certainly looks incoherent.' Hughes then attempts to rescue this notion from incoherence by positing that God has 'insular attributes', ones which are found in God alone and are therefore subsistent as God himself. However, the moment one recognizes that God does in some sense share certain of these attributes with creatures 'conspecifically',[152] their subsisting in God alone and as God himself is eradicated. Moreover, if some attributes (e.g., omnipotence) remain wholly insular while others do not, then the attributes cannot be identical to one another. Against the counterpoint that perhaps Thomas' use of analogical predication makes a difference here, Hughes interprets analogical predication as an implicate of the (in his view, fatally flawed) essence-existence identity in God and therefore rejects it in favor of univocity. He then surmises that, for a more satisfactory approach, one might envision God having a single 'superrich property', identical to God's essence, that supplies the single 'supervenience base' which grounds all the divine attributes.[153]

For Hughes, the question of whether God's 'intrinsic properties' could be identical to God himself determines whether God's essence is identical to God himself: 'if God has properties that are neither included in nor follow upon that essence, He cannot very well be the same as His essence.' But, he avers, not all of God's 'intrinsic properties' could be 'constant from world to world' and, therefore, God's essence is not

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[152] Apparently, for Hughes, these can be both insular and in some sense shared because, as he says, having perfect goodness still entails 'a fortiori' having goodness, which is shared by creatures (*On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, p. 67).
[153] Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 62-87.

identical to God himself. An intrinsic property is 'one that a thing has just in virtue of the way that thing is' in contrast to an 'extrinsic property', which is 'one that a thing has at least in part because of the way other things are'. In addition, Hughes defines an 'essential property' as one that is possessed by an individual 'in every world in which [that individual] exists'. But God's knowledge, which is an intrinsic property, could have varied 'from world to world' because God could have created any of a number of possible worlds. Hughes' argument here requires that one concentrate less on omniscience in general (which he regards as essential in God) and more on God believing that something in particular is true in some particular world, but, at any rate, he regards such belief as an intrinsic but amissible property and thus an intrinsic property that cannot be identical with God himself. But this implies that, with an intrinsic but inessential property – one that may vary 'from world to world' and thus lie beyond the divine essence – God cannot be identical to his own essence.[154]

Gale reiterates the perception of the logical impossibility of the identity of God's properities. In his view, because 'ordinary degrees' of the different properties are not identical, it holds, *a fortiori* that in 'unlimited degrees' there is even less likelihood of their being identical.[155] In the eyes of Moreland and Craig, whether the identity is posited with respect to the referent or the sense of the words used to describe God, 'it seems patently false' that one property (such as divine goodness) should be identical with another (omnipotence, for example).[156] In Richards' examination of classical claims about God, he endeavors to provide a sympathetic reading while still revising traditional

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[154] Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 106-8, 113-14.
[155] Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, p. 24.
[156] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 524-5.

views with what he calls 'contemporary essentialism', which proposes principally that 'Christians should affirm that God has an essence, which includes his perfections and essential properties, and should attribute to God essential and contingent properties.'[157] In this framework, God's essential properties are not strictly identical but rather 'coextensive' and, since God exists necessarily, 'God exemplifies all his essential properties in every possible world.'[158] In light of these concerns about the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity, Jeffrey Brower invokes the concept of a 'truthmaker' and suggests that defending the identity of God's attributes could be as straightforward as positing that God himself is the singular and simple reality who is such that all his attributes are truthfully predicated of him.[159]

Third, there is the objection that the identity of God's essence and existence is utterly unintelligible. For it requires one to say that in God's case there is no entity that exists but just an existence that exists and so, obscurely, that existence (a property) has itself as its own property. On Hughes' reading, the claim of identity turns out to be 'necessarily false': 'God would be an existence, which was not the existence of anything but that existence….It is like supposing that something could be the whiteness of itself, and nothing but itself.' However, '[W]hiteness just is the sort of thing that exists in another. Surely, though, existence is no different from whiteness on this score, in which case neither God nor anything else could be just its own existence.' Again, 'a merely subsistent substance is too thin to be possible.' Further, if God were just his own

[157] Richards, *Untamed God*, p. 17.
[158] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 216-28, 231-40.
[159] Jeffrey Brower, 'Making Sense of Divine Simplicity', *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008), p. 18. See also Alexander Pruss, 'On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity', in Jonathan Kvanvig (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 150-67.

existence, this would undermine his also being wise, good, and so on. One could appeal

here to a possible difference between God's existence and the creature's existence, but

Hughes 'cannot grasp' 'any intelligible content to the idea that there is a difference

between having existence according to its full power, and having existence according to

something less than full power'. For '[e]xistence is an on/off property: either you're

there or you're not.'[160] Barry Miller responds to Hughes by marking that Thomas'

account of *esse* has been 'misunderstood' and 'misrepresented' and by offering his own

constructive version of *esse subsistens* in which that *esse* (in Miller's words, a 'zero-

bound' existence) is qualitatively different from that of creatures.[161]

However, Moreland and Craig concur with Hughes, judging that the identity of

God's essence and existence is 'wholly obscure, since there is in God's case no entity that

exists; there is just the existing itself without any subject. Things exist; but it is

unintelligible to say that *exists* just exists.'[162] Aiming to preserve core medieval insights

about God's being without always grasping their meaning, Richards perpetuates this

resistence toward the identity of God's essence and existence and takes the classical

claim about the identity of God's essence and God's existence to mean that '[u]nlike the

rest of us, the "whatness" of God includes his existing.' That is, 'it is one of his essential

properties that he necessarily exist.'[163]

Fourth, there is the objection that divine simplicity is a threat to the freedom of

God. For, if God is identical with his essence, and he and his essence are identical with

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[160] Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 21-8, 55-7.

[161] Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), pp. 60-80.

[162] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 524-5.

[163] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 221-2.

all of his properties, then all of his properties must be essential and necessary and he

therefore must do all the things (e.g., create the world, know the facts of this world as

actual, assume a human nature) that warrant his having his contingent properties, which

are, as it happens, no longer really contingent. As Morris puts it, the identity of all God's

properties in the doctrine of divine simplicity apparently entails a 'modal uniformity' of

his properties, which poses difficulties if one wishes to say that God is, for example,

necessarily good but only contingently the Creator of the universe.[164]

Focusing on Thomas' formulation of divine simplicity, Eleonore Stump and

Norman Kretzmann take up the question of the compatibility of divine simplicity and

divine freedom: if 'God has no unactualized potentialities but is entirely actual, or in act,'

then it seems that 'the doctrine entails that God could not do anything other or otherwise

than he actually does.' To address the problem, Stump and Kretzmann note that, for

Thomas, God wills himself (is inclined toward his own goodness) with an absolute

necessity but wills creation with only a conditional necessity. It is 'logically possible' for

God not to create but, given God's immutability and his decision to create, it cannot now

be otherwise. The heart of their proposal is to 'weaken' divine simplicity and in so doing

to 'develop' Thomas' view so that 'God is not the same in all possible worlds.' Rather,

God is fully in act and determinate given 'a single possible initial world-state' or 'initial-

state set': 'Within any initial-state set of possible worlds God's nature is fully and

immutability determinate, and it is so as a consequence of the single, timeless act of will

in which God wills goodness (himself) and whatever else (if anything) he wills for the

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[164] Morris, 'On God and Mann', pp. 302, 311-17.

sake of goodness in that initial-state set.'[165] In his comments on Stump and Kretzmann's article, James Ross contends that simplicity need not be 'relativised' to a 'given initial-state set of worlds'. Rather, to remain faithful to Thomas, one must preserve God's 'trans-world' simplicity. For Ross, 'God's act is to his freedom as determinate to determinable' and in this way 'the *de re* truth condition for all God's attributes' remains the same whether he creates or not or creates this world or some other. 'There is no way, then, for there to be a real distinction between God's necessary being and God's contingent acting, whatever its content,' even if under 'counterpossibles' God might be 'rationally distinct from God as he is'.[166]

Within this discussion about divine simplicity and divine freedom, Vallicella provides arguments for the identity of God and God's properties and of each of God's properties with the others but goes on to amend the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity by acknowledging that God has accidental properties ('having created this world', 'knowing the conjunction of all truths'). Thus, the maxim 'what God has, he is' must be significantly qualified.[167] Rogers too recognizes simplicity's 'worrisome corollary' that God, as act, apparently never could have chosen not to create us, and she accepts that our free choices necessarily 'affect God's nature'.[168] In keeping with

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[165] Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Absolute Simplicity', *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 355, 362-9.

[166] James Ross, 'Comments on "Absolute Simplicity"', *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 383, 387-8. In a reply to Ross, Stump and Kretzmann urge that they are not beholden to a pattern of thinking in which one must compare and contrast 'the way God is' and 'the way he might have been'. Rather, their essay explores territory '*within* the way [God] is' and in so doing explicates a logical distinction between 'the way he is necessarily and the way he is contingently' ('Simplicity Made Plainer: A Reply to Ross', *Faith and Philosophy* 4 [1987], p. 199).

[167] Valicella, 'Divine Simplicity', pp. 512-13, 517.

[168] Rogers, 'Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', pp. 166, 170-4, 178-86.

Rogers' reading of the implications of simplicity but without sanctioning them, Moreland and Craig reason that God's identity with his existence entails that 'God cannot know or do anything different from what he knows and does.' 'Thus divine simplicity leads to an extreme fatalism.'[169] In Richards' revisioning of divine simplicity, in which God's properties are not identical but still 'co-extensive', he clarifies that not all of God's properties are co-extensive because not all are essential: some are contingent but still intrinsic and not merely extrinsic, 'Cambridge' properties. God, then, has essential and accidental properties.[170]

Fifth, and finally, there is the objection that divine simplicity cannot cohere with the doctrine of the Trinity. If all of God's properties are identical, or, if there is no multiplicity in God, then, it is said, the divine persons cannot be distinct from one another. Instead of allowing the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity to shape the doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps it is best to allow the Trinity to prune divine simplicity. Moreland and Craig state that Thomas' doctrine of divine simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity are 'doubtless inconsistent', for, if God 'transcends all distinctions', his being cannot include three distinct persons. Indeed, with divine simplicity, each person must be identical with the divine essence, but two things that are identical with a third must be

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[169] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 524-5.

[170] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 231-40. A 'Cambridge' property is something predicated of a thing that is not an internal constituent of it but rather just an extrinsic relation whose ontic significance lies with the other term in the relation. For example, in contemporary philosophical parlance, one might say that Cambridge has the 'property' of a given individual being a certain distance from it. Of course, as the individual in the example moves and changes his or her distance from Cambridge, Cambridge itself is not in any way changed. Whether this sort of 'property' is in fact a property at all is called into question later in the present study.

identical with each other, which then precludes the distinctions between the persons.[171] Richards echoes this sentiment: the strict identity of all God's properties is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity, wherein there are 'person-constituting differences' that rule out holding that 'every essential divine property or relation is strongly equivalent.'[172]

In observing the concerns and proposals of the analytic philosophers, one encounters several different ways of dealing with divine simplicity. Some simply raise objections to the doctrine and then perhaps adumbrate that simplicity is not needed to secure the points that it is meant to secure (e.g., divine aseity or necessity) (Plantinga, Morris, Hughes, Gale, Moreland, Craig); others undertake defenses of the doctrine in hopes of demonstrating that it need not be abandoned or modified (Mann, Ross, Leftow, Rogers, Brower, Pruss); still others contemplate modifications to the doctrine that might make it more plausible in the contemporary setting (Stump, Kretzmann, Valicella, Richards). In addition, there are those who work to highlight ways in which a medieval theologian such as Thomas and a contemporary philosopher such as Plantinga operate with different ontologies and are largely talking past one another (Wolterstorff, Rogers, Richards). The five objections, along with these modifications of the doctrine and second-order observations about the use of divergent philosophical frameworks, are marked here because they will receive attention in appropriate places throughout this work.

After compiling the criticisms of modern and contemporary systematic theologians and of the analytic philosophers, one notices that there are both overlapping

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[171] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 580, 583, 586-7, 590-4.
[172] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 228-31.

and peculiar concerns. The present undertaking aims to unfold a dogmatic account of divine simplicity mentored by Thomas and Reformed orthodox figures that is constructive in its own right but also meets and responds to the various arguments and assertions found in both scholarly camps. The next chapter, then, outlines this approach, indicating its methodological commitments, distinguishing it from the other approaches on offer, and supplying a cartography of the doctrine of divine simplicity to be developed in the following chapters.

II. Contours of a Dogmatic Approach

The burden of this section is less to unfurl a lengthy treatment of the character and legitimacy of dogmatic theology than to provide a description of it that will suffice to delineate presuppositions and secure procedural clarity in the task at hand. In brief, the need here is threefold: (1) to identify the function of dogmatics in relation to biblical exegesis; (2) to explicate the relation between dogmatics and metaphysics and the set of metaphysical aids exploited in this project;[173] and (3) to distinguish between the use of these metaphysical aids and the bearing of contemporary analytic philosophy's forays into Christian doctrine. Along with their positive import, the first and second of these tasks contain an inchoate response to skepticism about usage of extrabiblical and metaphysical concepts and thereby anticipate the claim that divine simplicity is truly a biblical doctrine, while the third naturally isolates and critiques some liabilities with the analytic frame.[174]

A. Exegesis, Dogmatics, and Metaphysics

As Holy Scripture furnishes the material content of Christian theology, the work of dogmatics is principally that of the rational ordering and elaboration of *dogmata*, or

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[173] The language here gestures toward the fact that this section, on the one hand, attempts to characterize dogmatics *in se* and, on the other hand, attempts also to mark particular features of the instantiation of dogmatics in this work.
[174] The singular 'frame' is not meant to obfuscate the different ways in which philosophers might approach the Christian doctrine of God, but it does suggest that there are often common assumptions and themes in play, even if the danger of caricature must be noted.

the *articuli fidei* delivered in the scriptural teaching. The peculiar contribution of

dogmatics is not merely a cataloguing of various biblical passages but an engagement of

Christian dogma under *capita theologiae* (often characterized as *loci communes*

theologici) in which *dogmata* are 'collected and aptly framed toward one another' and

also 'explicated through divisions'.[175] Such explication, with its use of extrabiblical

terminology and categories and appropriation of traditionary doctrinal treatments, can be

viewed with suspicion in the realm of biblical studies, but, as one biblical scholar

reasons, 'it is neither possible nor desirable to try to interpret the Bible without making

heuristic use of post-biblical categories….What matters is less whether the category is

biblical or post-biblical than whether it (negatively) does not force the biblical context

into inappropriate moulds but (positively) enables penetrating grasp of the nature and

content of the biblical text.'[176] Accordingly, the teaching ministry of the church and its

theological guides generates 'systems of divinity' in 'methodical disposition' 'to help the

understandings and the memories of men'.[177] In this didactic labor,

> use is to be made of words and expressions as, it may be, are not literally and
> formally contained in the Scripture; but only are, unto our conceptions and
> apprehensions, expository of what is so contained. And to deny the liberty, yea,
> the necessity hereof, is to deny all interpretation of the Scripture, – all endeavours
> to express the sense of the words of it unto the understandings of one another;
> which is, in a word, to render the Scripture itself useless.[178]

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[175] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 1, cap. 1, 4-5, p. 3.

[176] R. W. L. Moberly, 'How Appropriate Is Monotheism as a Category for Biblical Interpretation?', in Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North, eds., *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), p. 218.

[177] John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in vol. 4 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), VI, 2, 6, pp. 188, 190-1.

[178] John Owen, *Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 379. Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, I, qu. 12, 3, p. 42.

In this connection, while dogmatics can be distinguished from exegesis insofar as the latter is often taken as the interpretation of individual passages prosecuted without the conceptual, inferential rigor and scope typically displayed in dogmatic work, dogmatics in another sense just is exegesis carried out in a certain elaborative manner.[179] Significantly, taking the responsibility of dogmatics as that of offering a conceptual précis on biblical teaching clears a space in which one can argue that divine simplicity is (materially and implicitly) a biblical description of God.

Thus with Barth, Torrance, Gunton, and others in modern theology who call for concentration on the economy and the Bible, the present work endeavors to take its stand firmly within the field of the scriptural teaching and yet, in developing a traditional notion of God's simplicity, proposes to demonstrate that it is in fact a conclusion of exegesis undertaken in an inferential comportment. However, so far it has been maintained only generally that extrabiblical concepts are required to shed light on the content of Holy Scripture. What, then, of the use of concepts of overtly metaphysical tenor? To curb skepticism at this juncture, we do well to observe with Pannenberg the inherently biblical impetus for engagement with philosophical discourse: 'the claim of the God of Israel to be alone the God to whom all men belong provides the theological basis for the fact that Christian faith has to become involved in the philosophical question

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[179] On this point, I am indebted to my doctoral supervisor, Ivor Davidson, a staunch advocate for the fundamentally exegetical character of systematic theology. The difference between systematics and exegesis may be brought to light to some extent by the distinction between *theologia infusa* and *theologia acquisita* (on which, see, e.g., Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 1, cap. 13, p. 15), yet the common aim is faithful representation of the content of Holy Scripture.

about the true God and has to give an account of its answer right down to the present time.'[180] More specifically,

> This fundamental state of affairs is expressed in the fact that Paul, in Galatians 4:8, designates the heathen gods…as 'by nature no gods'. This statement implies that the God Paul preaches is alone God by virtue of his essence. And this assertion basically involves linking up with the philosophical question about that which is divine 'by nature'. Paul himself effected such a linkage with Stoic natural theology – even if by means of a critical refraction – and assimilated the negative designations of God as invisible and incorruptible (Rom. 1:20ff.).[181]

To Paul's discourse at the Areopagus and the use of θειότης ('divinity') in Romans 1:20 and φύσις ('nature') in Galatians 4:8, we may add talk of θεότης ('deity') in Colossians 2:9, the ὑπόστασις ('substance') of God the Father in Hebrews 1:3, and θεία φύσις ('divine nature') in 2 Peter 1:4.[182] Whether the New Testament authors, in employing such terminology, were bearing in mind all the niceties of philosophical conceptualization or not, the point still remains that even the allegedly simple-minded apostolic communities do not shrink back from describing God with metaphysical language. As Christoph Schwöbel notes, while the New Testament writings are not meant to function as exercises in the technical discipline of ontology, '[i]f ontology concerns the relationship between what there is to from whom it is and through whom it

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[180] Pannenberg, 'Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God', p. 136.

[181] Pannenberg, 'Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God', p. 136.

[182] Scott Hafemann ('"Divine Nature" in 2 Pet 1,4 within Its Eschatological Context', *Biblica* 94 [2013], p. 91) argues that, while φύσει in Galatians 4:8 possesses an 'ontological meaning', θείας...φύσεως in 2 Peter 1:4 'is best taken not as referring to divine "being" or "essence"…but as a reference to God's dynamic character as expressed in the attitudes and/or actions that it brings forth or produces'. Yet, if Hafemann is correct, one must still drive a wedge between essence and 'character' shown forth in action in order to suggest that 2 Peter 1:4 does not gesture at all to what God is as God. Further, the close relationship between nature and action is well-marked in the metaphysical works invoked in this thesis wherein nature is *principium actionis*.

is, then a statement like 1 Cor. 8:6 clearly is an ontological statement.'[183]   Furthermore,

given the 'universality' and 'eschatological finality' of Christian theological truth, '[t]he

engagement of Christian theology with Greek metaphysics is an inevitable development.'

Indeed, 'Christian theologians perfected the exercise of snatching the intellectual

weapons from their philosophical opponents, modifying and reshaping them for their

purposes, to a fine art. All of this, of course, for the purpose of demonstrating the truth of

the Christian message by the most sophisticated intellectual tools available.' In other

words, in trekking from Jerusalem to Athens and back again, Christian theology proper is

able to expound its exegetical commitments and also from the inside, as it were, subvert

the claims of non-Christian philosophy for polemical and even evangelistic ends.[184]

Further, along with the broader claims of Pannenberg and Schwöbel included

here, more detailed historical studies on the relationship between Christian theology and

Greek metaphysics have recently demonstrated that the catholic patristic authors and later

mainstream lights do not naively absorb the ruminations of non-Christian thinkers but

rather retain their Christian convictions and sift and utilize the resources of non-Christian

philosophical discourse with critical awareness.[185] All of this suggests that one cannot

dismiss simplicity and other similar divine attributes with a mere mention of the

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[183] Christoph Schwöbel, 'The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009), p. 29. Compare Scott R. Swain, *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology*, Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), pp. 122-3.

[184] Schwöbel, 'The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem', pp. 37-8, 41.

[185] See, e.g., Joseph Owens, 'Aristotle and Aquinas', in Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 38-59; Thomas F. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Soskice, 'Athens and Jerusalem, Alexandria and Edessa'.

unfortunate influence of Greek philosophy, and it conduces to an account of divine simplicity that, on the one hand, is a work of dogmatic elaboration drawing from older treatments and at times commandeering classical metaphysical terminology and, on the other hand, contends that the doctrine of divine simplicity is an implicate of the scriptural portrayal of God.

With these things in mind, a sketch of the relationship between dogmatics and metaphysics is in order, and it is appropriate first to outline the conception of metaphysics that is operative in this study before going on to flesh out how theology can mine its resources. In addition to Thomas' metaphysics, the metaphysical works of Keckermann, Alsted, and Maccovius provide guidance here. For Keckermann, metaphysics is 'the science of being [*entis*], or of a thing [*rei*] absolutely and generally accepted' and, as such, is *prima philosophia*. It concerns *ens* (*id quod est* and *quod essentiam habet*), or *res qua res*.[186] In treating of being, metaphysics plots its divisions, principles, modes, relations, and so on. Similarly, Alsted defines metaphysics as *sapientia…de ente in quantum ens est*. Metaphysics handles being *reduplicative*, taking it according to just its formal reason *qua ens*, while logic handles being *specificative*, modifying and restricting being with various predicates. Metaphysics focuses especially on *ens reale* yet as *abstractissimum*, while other disciplines prescind *particulam quondam entis*.[187] Likewise, Maccovius takes metaphysics as *scientia contemplativa,*

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[186] Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium, in Duas Partes Distributum*, in *Operum Omnium quae Extant, Tomus Primus* (Geneva, 1614), pars 1, cap. 1-2, pp. 2013-15.
[187] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, pp. 19, 21-2, 24.

quae tractat de Ente, quatenus Ens est. Its object is *ens in genere*, with *ens* again being

taken as *quod essentiam habet*.[188]

      Having delimited the discipline of metaphysics, these authors are quick to clarify

how it relates to God. Instead of subsuming God under the categories of metaphysics,

they promptly locate God outside the bounds of metaphysics altogether: 'The

metaphysician does not treat of God as metaphysician. For God is still something beyond

being [*supra Ens*].'[189] Put differently, metaphysics is *scientia universalis* but

'universal…not in respect of theology. For this [theology] in a certain way contains all

the remaining sciences….Nor is this contained in the scope of philosophy.'[190] Maccovius

grants only a small allowance for metaphysics to come into contact with God: 'in

metaphysics it is not taught concerning God, except by the mode of a cause.' For 'God is

not in any order of creatures but outside every order of creature.'[191] Alsted even carefully

distinguishes between metaphysics and natural theology: metaphysics is *sapientia*

generalissima and has *generalissimum subjectum*, whereas natural theology has for its

subject God, who is *ens singularissimum*.[192] In sum, the disciplinary niche of

metaphysics is created, finite, common being, under which God the Creator cannot be

situated. As will be discussed below, this entails that, if metaphysical concepts are

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[188] Johannes Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, 3rd ed., ed. Adrianus Heereboord (Lugduni Bavatorum, 1658), lib. 1, cap. 1, pp. 1-3.
[189] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 1, p. 2015. As it is frequently said, (e.g., Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 145), God is οὐσια ὑπερούσιος.
[190] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, p. 18.
[191] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 1, p. 180; cap. 6, p. 265.
[192] Johann H. Alsted, *Theologiae Naturalis* (Antonius Hummius, 1615), pars 1, cap. 1, p. 8.

applied to God, we must acknowledge their limitations and insist that they first pass through the filter of the biblical Creator-creature distinction.

This demarcation of metaphysics means, on the one hand, that metaphysics (or, more broadly, philosophy) *per se* is not at odds with theology and, on the other hand, that it is also not positioned to govern the practice of theology. Because 'God and the creature of God do not fight between themselves, truth is one and simple,' and, consequently, 'nor is it divided.' Therefore, the disciplines treating these objects and apprehending truth about them also are not against one another. If philosophy, then, is taken 'properly, for the intellectual powers themselves or for the disciplines *per se* and observed in their own nature', rather than *improprie* and 'for the errors of the philosophers, namely, Plato, Aristotle, and others', then 'theology and philosophy do not fight but agree.'[193] When Paul condemns *philosophia* in Colossians 2:8, he condemns, not *vera philosophia*, but *philosophia corrupta* and 'the confusion of teachings, when philosophy is taught for theology'. Thus, problems arise only when philosophy is done poorly or when it transgresses its borders and masquerades as properly theological teaching.[194]

Yet, while theology and philosophy enjoy a scientific harmony, they are not coordinate disciplines: the former is over the latter and the latter is subordinate to the former. In this connection, philosophy is never *domina theologiae* but only *ancilla theologiae*: like Sara and Hagar, *domina* and *serva*, 'theology rules philosophy, and this

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[193] Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Brevis et Simplex Consideratio Controversiae Hoc Tempore a Nonnullis Motae, de Pugna Philosophiae & Theologiae*, in *Praecognitorum Philosophicorum, Libri Duo* (Hanoviae, 1612), pp. 184-6. Here Keckerkmann opposes the notion of *duplex veritas*, not because there are not many truths to be learned about God and creatures, but because truth is not intrinsically discordant.
[194] Keckermann, *Brevis et Simplex Consideratio Controversiae*, pp. 192-3.

[philosophy] serves and complies with it [theology].'[195] Because it must speak about the reality of God, dogmatics will naturally seek the assistance of a set of concepts calibrated for ontological discourse. Yet, because of the divinity of its object and dominion of its science, when it comes into contact with metaphysics' treatment of *ens in genere creatum*, it is free to annex, consecrate, and modify metaphysics' conceptual apparatus for its own expository purposes.

It should be apparent that this configuration of the relationship between dogmatics and metaphysics formally undermines Ritschl's claim that the harnessing of metaphysical concepts inevitably yields a humanly devised, generic conception of God.[196] (Whether this is so with respect to the actual doctrinal formulation in what follows is a question to be answered by the reader.) Having characterized the annexation of metaphysical concepts for use in theology proper and briefly defended the general practice, we may now consider why it should be fitting to exploit the Aristotelian tradition in particular as mediated and modified by Thomas and a number of the Reformed scholastic theologians. Such exploitation is contingent and in some measure an *ad hoc* decision, but four things may be said in its defense.

First, as we have already noted, certain essentialist terminology and patterns of thought found in the broadly Aristotelian tradition appear in the New Testament itself (Acts 14:15; Rom. 1:20; Gal. 4:8; Phil. 2:7-8, Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3; Jas. 5:17; 2 Pet. 1:4), even if the New Testament authors do not offer excurses on the philosophical

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[195] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, I, qu. 13, 2, p. 49.

[196] This contrasts with some of the statements of Bruce McCormack in his 'The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism', in Bruce L. McCormack, ed., *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2008), pp. 188, 211-12, 223.

discriminations invested in these terms.[197] This is not to make a naïve claim that

Aristotle receives wholesale justification in Holy Scripture, for he patently receives no

such treatment. Rather, it is to suggest that, because there are at least some points of

contact between the metaphysical framework begun in Aristotle and revised in Thomas,

Keckermann, and others, on the one hand, and certain concepts and judgments in the

apostolic teaching, on the other hand, it is at least defensible for theologians to avail

themselves of terms like 'essence', 'accidents', and so on in laboring to illumine the

scriptural portrayal of God. To state it rather bluntly, the older metaphysics is closer to

the conceptual milieu of the New Testament than, for example, the dialectics of Hegelian

thought.

Second, the set of concepts cultivated by Aristotle (and, more broadly, ancient

Greek philosophy[198]) which the early church used in steering around the heresies of

tritheism, Arianism, and the rest is not lightly cast aside. Tradition alone is not an

adequate ground for retaining old habits, but after these philosophical aids have

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[197] The adjective 'essentialist' here is meant to indicate simply that the biblical authors
evince a readiness to make note of things as to their essences, particularly deity and
humanity. In the contemporary scene, John Oderberg's *Real Essentialism*, Routledge
Studies in Contemporary Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2007) is a critique of
philosophical declension from a more robust understanding of essence as that which
objectively constitutes a thing and precedes the question of modality to an attenuated
view of essence in which essence is what something necessarily has. Such declension
can be observed in Richards version of essentialism in his *Untamed God*. In systematic
theology, McCormack ('Actuality of God', pp. 201, 210, 213-14) denounces
'essentialism' as belief in a divine essence that precedes God's 'primordial decision' to
be for us in the covenant of grace. For McCormack, God's essence is what it is only in
and indeed *by* his decision *ad creaturas*. Against McCormack, the present work holds
that the divine essence is not informed by God's election and that it is not for that reason
inert but rather absolutely active in God himself and then also toward the world.
[198] Even if Aristotle established a significant paradigm for the metaphysics operative in
the works of Thomas and Reformed orthodox theologians, it would be a mistake to speak
as if other ancient philosophers were not contributing to the philosophical tradition.

sharpened and nurtured the mind of the church for centuries, they surely still hold promise for reinvestigating and formulating Christian doctrine. Third, because of the uniqueness of the Christian God and the particularity of his revelation in Scripture, one cannot expect to find any set of metaphysical aids that does not require some adjustment for use in theology. The Aristotelian framework as reconfigured in Thomas and the triad of Reformed scholastics discussed above suffers no initial disadvantage in relation to other metaphysical media offering their services to theology. Indeed, while the Thomistic and Thomistic Reformed orthodox treatments of *ens creatum* must be modified for theology – and are consciously modified by their own architects – the moment the object of inquiry is no longer creaturely but divine, one can argue that various other metaphysical systems (again, the example of Hegelian dialecticism comes to mind) are even less suited for passing into the realm of theological description. If a principal aim of a given system is to show how God is necessarily caught up in a process of self-actualization wherein he depends upon creation to reach fulfillment, it would seem quite difficult to achieve a satisfactory modification that enables one to do justice to the freedom of God's decision to create the world (Acts 17:24-28).[199]

Finally, the Thomistic conceptual matrix provides a platform on which competing perspectives can be discussed and debated. It may seem automatically to favor those who sympathize with Thomas and other more traditional theologians on divine simplicity, divine immutability, and other matters, but it can in principle also serve to express even the belief that God is susceptible to change and suffering. As we have seen, Jüngel, for example, distills the conviction that God is affected and moved by creation in the

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[199] Of course, this accentuates the influence of exegetical conclusions in the selection of metaphysical conceptual aids.

suggestion that God can receive accidents.[200] Accordingly, the use of this metaphysics is in itself not an inexorable preclusion of the views espoused by Moltmann, Jenson, and others but is in one respect simply a means of organizing and clarifying one's thoughts for the advancement of theological discourse. In sum, use of this metaphysical outfit can be commended on several grounds, including its conceptual connection with Scripture, its historic fruitfulness in the development of doctrine, the fact that other systems would require comparable and perhaps even greater amendment for theological utility, and its ability to structure and facilitate dialogue and debate.

This section has briefly charted the relationships between dogmatic theology and exegesis and between dogmatic theology and metaphysics. It has contended that dogmatic elaboration of scriptural teaching is necessary for the theological formation of the believing mind and does well to adapt metaphysical language for theological description. This section has also argued for the legitimacy of commandeering the particular metaphysics inaugurated by Aristotle and revised by Thomas and Thomistic Reformed orthodox writers. In so doing, it has begun to address one of the major concerns about the doctrine of divine simplicity enunciated by influential voices in modern and contemporary theology, namely, that it represents a capitulation to Hellenistic and non-Christian philosophy.

The above rendition of dogmatics in relation to metaphysics is not an exoneration of every detail of every construal of simplicity in the tradition. Nor is it yet a demonstration of the biblical and particularly Christian grain of divine simplicity in the account to be provided in this study. It does, however, undercut the assumption that one

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[200] Jüngel, 'Theses', p. 66.

simply cannot do properly Christian theology and yet arrive at the doctrine of divine simplicity articulated in Thomas and developed in Reformed orthodox theology. Thus, it provides traction for the material and constructive portion of this thesis. But first it is necessary to uncover and explicate the differences between the dogmatic approach advocated here and the posture of analytic philosophy visible in the preceding review of its approach to divine simplicity.

B.   Dogmatics and Analytic Philosophy

In identifying ways in which a dogmatic engagement of divine simplicity differs from the general approach of analytic philosophy, what has been said already in favor of this dogmatic engagement – that it is (or at least strives to be) materially biblical and that it divests philosophical resources of any claim to ultimacy before granting them a place in theological description – appears this time in demurral of the broad analytic posture. Talk of a 'posture' in the singular is not meant to imply that all analytic philosophers exploring Christian theology do so in exactly the same manner or that none of them make salutary points in discussing and even commending divine simplicity. However, it does suggest that, in prominent iterations of the analytic philosophical examination of the doctrine of God, there are common features that prove to be problematic. Here we consider four ways in which a dogmatic deportment differs from the general analytic approach.

First, a dogmatic approach aims to remain, in its subject matter and in its ends, transparent and answerable to the teaching of Holy Scripture. It defers to Holy Scripture

to legislate the material content to be considered and explicated in theological reflection, and this material content determines the inferences and discriminations that should be made in doctrinal formulation. In short, 'Christian theology is biblical reasoning.'[201] Thus, dogmatics is a rational work, 'not because *a priori* it necessarily demonstrates its own truth with reasons…but because it demonstrates conclusions from the authority of Scripture, and with reasons deduced from Scripture'.[202] As in the best of the Reformed scholastics, the role of reason, then, is apprehensive and receptive and then instrumental and ministerial, rather than principial or magisterial.[203]

By contrast, the analytic literature (whether intentionally or unintentionally) often exhibits only a vague connection to Scripture and, like medieval scholasticism in its more indulgent moments, risks becoming, to borrow Turretin's colorful language, an exercise of 'air-walkers' (ἀεροβατούντων) caught up in mere 'logic-choppings' (λεπτολογήμασι).[204] That is, it risks becoming detached from scriptural substance and grounding and occupied with ethereal hypotheses about rational constructs and ways in which these might be fine-tuned and brought into the strictest coherence. Hence Mann's advocacy of divine simplicity leads into a proposal about everything having a 'rich property' with which it is identical, while Morris' rejection of divine simplicity presses him to postulate that God somehow creates his own nature and Hughes' alternative to simplicity's identity of God's

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[201] John Webster, 'Biblical Reasoning', *Anglican Theological Review* 90 (2008), p. 733 et passim.

[202] Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 1, p. 3.

[203] See Turretin, *Instituto Theologiae Elencticae*, I, qu. 8, 1-24, pp. 26-31.

[204] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 24, 16, p. 290; qu. 25, 6, p. 294. The translation of the Greek terms is from the English translation of Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1992), pp. 263, 266.

attributes wends into a musing about a 'superrich property' in God that functions as a 'supervenience base' for all the attributes.

Along with the biblical text, older theologians' treatments of the doctrine of God also sometimes receive inadequate attention. Of course, no responsible author – whether a theologian or a philosopher by training – would set out knowingly to misrepresent Augustine, Thomas, and the others. Nevertheless, Plantinga, for example, does not pause to consider how Thomas would understand the term 'property', while Moreland and Craig take the identity of God's essence and existence in Thomas to mean that 'exists just exists.' This clumsiness in reading older theologians and the implications of their views yields expressions of bewilderment that are made to double as (rather subjective) arguments against divine simplicity.[205] Perhaps one could respond to the criticism of inattentiveness to Scripture and the tradition by pointing out that the analytic investigation of God falls under the rubric of philosophical theology, whose disciplinary legitimacy does not hinge on deference to biblical exegesis or sympathy toward older theologians' works. Yet this trades on the belief that during this time in redemptive history natural theology (or, more precisely, theology built upon natural and general revelation and navigated by natural, and now corrupted, reason) and 'revealed theology' (or, more precisely, theology built upon supernatural and special revelation and navigated by faith seeking understanding) are coordinate undertakings, and this belief is called into question in the next point.

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[205] So Plantinga labels simplicity a 'dark saying indeed' (*Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 27), while Hughes confesses that he 'cannot grasp' any difference between existence in its 'full power' and existence in 'less than its full power' (*On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, p. 27) and Moreland and Craig opine that the identity of essence and existence is 'wholly obscure' (*Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, p. 525).

Second, a dogmatic approach recognizes that reason itself is embedded in the history of salvation and has come under the effects of the fall and stands in need of reformation. In the narration of Voetius, reason, which is, properly speaking, 'the faculty of the rational mind in man, with which he apprehends and judges intelligible things', may be considered 'in reason of a certain state, actually, before the fall as given in the image of God; in the fall, as corrupted; in grace, as liberated, although imperfectly; in glory, as perfectly illuminated with the light of glory'.[206] Thus, *in lapsu*, the 'mind' (νοῦς) is futile and the 'understanding' (διάνοια) is darkened (Eph. 4:17-18), inclining to suppression of the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Though the *liber naturae* is still legible and some knowledge of God persists as *preparatio ad scholam gratiae*, the *lector naturae* no longer reads with due sentience. Therefore, while it is not entirely devoid of insight (*Deus reliquit in homine lapso igniculos quosdam*), natural theology apart from the grace of regeneration propends to a distortion of divine truth. Beginning with natural theology, then, is a liability in the study of God. But God has seen fit 'the more obscure light of natural theology to be united and bound together with the most clear light of supernatural theology'. Hence, 'Scripture not only [teaches] the mysteries of faith, but also things of reason,' and the Holy Spirit illumines the mind and enables it rightly to apprehend God as both Creator and Redeemer. With Scripture as *principium Theologiae naturalis mixtum*, supernatural theology then so tutors and recovers natural theology that the theologian can once more read aright the book of nature and draw conclusions that truly befit the Creator.[207] If this is so, and if the analytic approach tends to overlook the

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[206] Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 1, pp. 1, 3.
[207] See Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars 1, cap. 1, pp. 2-3, 6-7. This configuration is different from that of Leftow, for example, for whom the impetus behind simplicity is the

need for the renewal of reason by supernatural theology and the illumination of the Spirit,[208] we may ask what in particular is sometimes obscured in the analytic approach, and this carries us to the next point.

Third, a dogmatic *modus operandi* entails submission to the biblical Creator-creature distinction and recognizes that this effects a mortification of our tendency straightforwardly to transfer ratiocination about creatures to God the Creator.[209] Unseating the theogonies of the Ancient Near East, the book of Genesis opens the canon of Scripture by simply assuming the being of God and then giving an account of the being of all else, thereby implying that God cannot be located within the *ordo entis communis*. In John's Gospel, God alone, with the Word, was in the beginning and, through the Word, made all that exists (1:1-3). These biblical themes will be considered more carefully later, but the essential point here is that the God of the Bible is *extra ordinem creaturarum*, and this signals a decisive relativization of philosophical reasoning, under which metaphysical terms and theorems can be only analogically applied to God.[210]

concept of a perfect being: 'someone must be the creator and sustainer of all that is distinct from himself' – and, by implication, must be simple – 'to qualify for the title "God"', and God must therefore be simple ('Is God an Abstract Object?', p. 582). Instead of casting a mold into which God must fit (even if the mold happens actually to suit God), this thesis begins with the authority and solidity of special revelation and then argues that God is simple.

[208] For reflection on these and related issues, see Alan Torrance, 'Analytic Theology and the Reconciled Mind: The Significance of History', *Journal of Analytic Theology* 1 (2013), pp. 30-44.

[209] Compare Webster, 'Biblical Reasoning', p. 750: 'Exegesis and dogmatics are indirectly ascetical disciplines. That is, they are intellectual activities in which the church participates in the mortification of reason which is inescapable if the children of Adam are to become friends of God.'

[210] David Burrell ('Creator/Creatures Relation: "The Distinction" vs. "Onto-theology"', *Faith and Philosophy* 25 [2008], p. 179) comments that the Creator-creature distinction

This analogical refraction is exemplified in various ways in the authors from whom the present work draws. Turretin, for example, notes that *substantia* is attributed to God not because he underlies and receives accidents but only because he subsists *per se*.[211] Similarly, when Maccovius treats *prima substantia*, which is *substantia* as 'complete, singular, undivided, and subsisting by itself', he writes that 'it does not necessarily include incommunicability, but only that it is subsisting by itself.' It is *suppositum* that adds *incommunicabilitas*, for, if God is considered (analogically) under the term *prima substantia*, this includes all three of the divine persons and thus it is as *supposita* and *personae* that the persons are distinct from one another and incommunicable. *Prima substantia* and *suppositum* 'are reciprocal in created things…because they are finite'. But in God the rule of *unitas substantiae, unitas suppositi* does not hold because he is infinite and thus as *prima substantia* does (and can) subsist as *tres supposita* or *personae*.[212] Again, metaphysical considerations become serviceable in theological description when in such ways they assume an analogical elasticity.

In contrast, the analytic literature often represents God as a being situated on the continuum of common being.[213] For Plantinga, God is 'the first being *of the universe*'.[214] In Plantinga, Hughes, and others, God is also then subsumed under possible-worlds

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'forbids any ordinary brand of "onto-theology" wherein a notion of being can be stretched to include the creator as well a creation'.

[211] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 23, 4, p. 280. A substance exists *per se* (and thus 'subsists') without needing to be in another, while accidents can exist only in another.

[212] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 1, pp. 179, 181-3.

[213] K. Scott Oliphint (*God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2012], pp. 14-15) pointedly remarks, 'The best one can hope for in

logic.[215] Gale talks of God's 'properties' differing (only) in degree from creatures' properties.[216] Even while defending divine simplicity, Stump and Kretzmann locate God 'within the world'.[217] This is arguably a manifestation of what Robert Sokolowski calls 'the natural impulse to see the divine as the best part of the world'. The proclivity here is for reason to operate 'within the context of the world or the whole': 'it may be able to disclose the various substantial necessities proper to things within the whole, and it may even be able to reach necessities that are proper to the whole as encompassing, but these are the limits that it pushes against in the extremity of its thinking.' Therefore, '[t]o think beyond the setting of the world and its necessities should be recognized for the unusual movement that it is.' Such a movement is a journey to the 'margin of reason'. Yet this is precisely what the 'Christian distinction' requires: '[i]n Christian belief the world or the whole itself is placed as one of the terms of a distinction'. Therefore, while reason's 'normal' and 'direct' exercise lies 'within the context of the world', 'the names and syntax that are at home within such a context must be properly adjusted if they are to function in the new horizon which now includes reason's normal setting as a subordinated part.'[218]

In light of various analytic philosophers' propensity for eliding the Creator-creature distinction and placing God 'within the whole', it is not surprising that a number

current discussions concerning the character of God in philosophy of religion is a conclusion that will steer us toward a kind of super-man rather than the triune God.'
[214] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 1, 9, 110 (emphasis added).
[215] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 140, 143; Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 59, 67; William Hasker, 'Simplicity and Freedom: A Response to Stump and Kretzmann', *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986), p. 193.
[216] Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, p. 26.
[217] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Absolute Simplicity', pp. 368-9.
[218] Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), pp. xi, 19, 31.

of them would reject analogy in favor of univocity in theological description. In

Plantinga's examination of simplicity he construes analogy and literality as opposites and

states that appealing to analogy in defense of simplicity halts the entire discussion

because, if 'we cannot rely on our usual styles of inference in reasoning about God', we

can no longer advance any meaningful arguments for or against the doctrine.[219]

Moreland and Craig take simplicity to entail the analogical view of theological language

and then assert that 'these [analogical] predicates must in the end fail, since there is no

univocal element in the predicates we assign to God, leaving us in a state of genuine

agnosticism about the nature of God.'[220] Leftow also moves in the direction of univocity,

contending that God and human persons can '[satisfy] the same predicates taken in the

same sense', but he also qualifies this by saying that 'what differ are the ways God and

creatures come to satisfy this predicate – the underlying situation that makes the

predications true.'[221]

      However, there is here not only a neglect of the Creator-creature distinction but

also a misunderstanding of the nature of analogy. Analogy in theological language is not

opposed to literality; rather, these two lie on two different linguistic spectra. In Thomas,

the former lies on a spectrum with univocity and equivocity, while the latter lies on a

spectrum with metaphorical speech, whose proper *res significata* is intristically

creaturely. Univocal use of a predicate entails that it is predicated of two subjects in

precisely the same sense, while purely equivocal use entails that it is predicated of two

subjects in two entirely different senses. Analogical use entails predication in two senses

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[219] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 58-9.
[220] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, p. 524.
[221] Leftow, 'Divine Simplicity', p. 375.

that are neither entirely the same nor entirely different. For Thomas, in the case of

human creatures predicates such as wisdom, goodness, and so on signify really distinct

qualities and each 'in a certain way circumscribes and comprehends the thing signified',

but in the case of God these predicates signify nothing other than the divine essence itself

under some aspect and yet also never circumscribe or comprehend the *rem significatam*.

On the second spectrum, literal use of a predicate such as wisdom or goodness entails

that, as to the *res significata*, it is predicated *proprie* of God and 'more properly than to

creatures themselves', even if as to the *modus significandi* it can be only *improprie*

predicated of God and *proprie* predicated of creatures.[222] Metaphorical use of a predicate

such as 'stone' entails that, as to the *res significata* as well as the *modus significandi*, it is

predicated only *improprie* of God and *proprie* of creatures. That is, in view of scriptural

teaching (not least the spirituality of God in John 4:24), what the predicate signifies is

intrinsically creaturely and cannot be applied to God except by way of similitude (in the

case of 'stone' or 'rock', a similitude of protecting and offering solidity).[223] The

difference between God and the creature necessitates that theological language should be

regarded as analogical (not applicable to God and the creature in precisely the same

sense) and yet, because predicates in theological language have a sense that is not entirely

different and are in a number of cases attributed literally to God, analogy does not

generate agnosticism about God. Only equivocity or an exclusively metaphorical

approach to theological language would terminate in agnosticism.

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[222] The *modus significandi* of theological language is always properly creaturely because
human beings learn and first use terms in their creaturely context and always speak of
God in a human and limited fashion.
[223] Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 3, pp. 143-4; art. 5, pp. 146-7.

In all of this, dogmatic theology does not plead for a suspension of the laws of thought, particularly the law of noncontradiction, in theological description.[224] Nor does it promote a non-cognitive or mystical theory of human speech about God. Yet, on the basis of the biblical Creator-creature distinction, a dogmatic methodology still presses us to consider whether certain methods of reasoning about the creature should be straightforwardly applied in the study of the Creator. As in Hilary's trenchant dictum, *non sermoni res, sed rei est sermo subjectus*.[225] In this connection, while analytic philosophical engagement of Christian doctrine often gives the impression that it is at last bringing an eye for precision and logic to the discipline of theology, this study suggests that Thomas, Voetius, Turretin, Mastricht, and others like-minded on the matter of divine simplicity remain faithful to Scripture and, under the pressure of the Creator-creature distinction, simultaneously outstrip analytic philosophy in attentiveness to precision and rational formulation. The concrete import of this Creator-creature distinction for the doctrine of divine simplicity will become clear in the chapters that follow, not least in sections dealing with divine aseity and the apparent tension between divine simplicity and the plurality of the divine attributes.

A fourth difference between the dogmatic account of simplicity ventured here and a swathe of the analytic literature is found in the divergent understandings of ontology.[226] In this account, older definitions and arrangements in ontology are taken up via Thomas and Reformed scholastic authors for the purpose of drawing out the implications of the

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[224] The Reformed orthodox, over against the Lutheran dogmaticians, grant the *judicium contradictionis* to reason in the practice of theology. See, e.g., Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elenctiae*, I, qu. 10, 1-16, pp. 36-9.

[225] Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, lib. 4, 14, p. 107.

[226] This is not a difference between dogmatics *per se* and analytic philosophy *per se* but between this particular dogmatic account and some prominent analytic treatments.

biblical text. *Ens* is taken as 'that which is' and 'that which has essence'. *Essentia* is

taken as an 'internal principle of a being [*principium entis internum*] by which a being

can exist in a certain place and time' and as the 'first act of a being' (*actus entis primus*),

though it relates to existence as potency to act.[227] *Essentia* is also characterized as 'that

by which a being is what it is' (quiddity), as 'the principle of action of a being' (nature),

and as a conceivable universal specifically unifying individual *supposita* (species).[228]

Existentia is 'essence determined to a certain place and time', 'the actuality of being' ('it

constitutes the whole essence in act'), and a 'principle of individuation'.[229] *Substantia*, as

prima substantia, is taken as *ens primarium* and 'substance complete, singular,

undivided, and subsisting by itself', and, as *secunda substantia*, is taken as 'substance not

determined by different individuals' and so as quiddity or species.[230] An accident is *ens*

secundarium and depends on substance in such a way that it cannot be except in a

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[227] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 1, pp. 2015-16.
[228] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 1, p. 2016; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3, p. 43.
[229] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 1, p. 2016; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 4, pp. 46-8.
[230] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 1, p. 2014; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 2, p. 253; Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 1, p. 196. John Wippel ('Metaphysics', in *Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, pp. 107-8) cautions against identifying *secunda substantia* in Aristotelian thought with *essentia* or *quidditas*. For *secunda substantia* may be predicated of *prima substantia* (*Sortes est homo*), while *quidditas* cannot be predicated of *prima substantia* (*Sortes non est humanitas*). However, if one wishes to restrict *secunda substantia* in this way, using Alsted's metaphysical distinctions, one can still say that *secunda substantia* is identical with *essentia* as *essentia essentiata*, which is 'nothing other than form in matter, that is, the composite itself', even if it is not identical with *essentia* as *essentia essentians*, which is strictly the principle that determines and actuates the composite (*Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3, pp. 43-4).

substance. Thus, *accidens* does not have *esse* but only *inesse*.[231] Properties are taken as *accidentia naturalia* that are 'created from the principles of the subject', in particular from the 'principles of species'. These then are called *propria*, as the ability to laugh is proper to a human person.[232]

A universal is taken as *unum quid* which 'pertains to many', and, whether it is discussed in relation to *essentia* and *secunda substantia* or in relation to *accidentia* and *proprietates*, it is helpfully parsed in a threefold scheme in Alsted's *Metaphysica*.[233] First, a universal *ante rem* (prior to the individual in which it is) or *ante multa* is granted only *cum grano salis* because such exists only as 'an idea separated from singulars, namely, as far as it is objectively in the divine intellect, and virtually in the divine omnipotence'.[234] This is both a general affirmation of the Aristotelian view of universals and also a revision of the Platonic doctrine of ideas or forms according to a Christian understanding of God's knowledge and creative power. In this framework there are no universals separated from the particular individuals in which they exist that are independently present in the world. If we should consider universals as prior to their instantiations in singular things, they are to be located in the mind of God and derived from God's essence, which in its plenitude serves as the primordial exemplar cause for all

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[231] See Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pp. 2036-7.

[232] Thomas, *In Quator Libros Sententarium*, lib. 1, dist. 17, qu. 1, art. 2, ad 2, p. 138; Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*, in vol. 8 of *Opera Omnia* (Parma, 1856), art. 12, ad 7, p. 503. See also John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp. 266-9.

[233] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 16, p. 142.

[234] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 16, p. 143-5.

created forms.[235] Second, a universal *in re* or *in multis* is *natura communis* which is 'in individuals, equally participated by these'. Third, a universal *post rem* or *post multa* is 'that which we gather from individual things in the mind'.[236] God's knowledge, then, supplies the ideas that typify universals in things, and we responsively apprehend universals in things and isolate them *in ratione*.

Not all of these conceptualizations are discarded in contemporary analytic philosophy, but where there are differences they influence how one maneuvers in the terrain of theology proper. With Plantinga and others, essence is no longer a *principium entis* but becomes a property possessed by a being.[237] In addition, properties are taken by Plantinga to be universals that exist not only independently of their particular created individuals but also independently of God himself. The first of these ontological shifts, the understanding of essence as a property or set of properties, has been criticized by Oderberg in an appeal for a return to the 'real essentialism' on offer in the Aristotelian tradition. Contemporary essentialism, Oderberg points out, has a penchant for reducing essence to a matter of modality (the essence of a thing is what that thing necessarily has in all possible worlds) and for construing essence as a 'bundle of essential features'. But essence itself precedes modal dynamics: what a thing is determines the modal characteristics and proclivities of that thing. And the interpretation of essence as a grouping of essential properties, Oderberg argues, fails to account for substances' enduring integrity and their unification and stratification of their many qualities, while real essentialism, in which essence is simply that which is constitutive of a thing and

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[235] See Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 15, art. 3, p. 204.
[236] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 16, p. 144.
[237] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 7, 30.

renders a thing what it is, is able to account for these phenomena.[238] Thus, contemporary

assumptions in ontology not only leave one susceptible to misunderstanding thinkers like

Thomas but also raise concerns in their own right, even if these cannot be considered in

detail here. The other ontological sensibility mentioned above, namely, Plantinga's view

of properties as universals, is so wielded in the critique of divine simplicity that he

attempts to refute the doctrine by merely assuming a Platonic realist account of properties

as universals: if properties (use of the term is continued for the sake of argument) are

intractably 'abstract objects', then of course God cannot be identified with a property or

set of properties.[239] But it will not suffice merely to assume a view that precludes the

doctrine of divine simplicity, especially if there is a more adequate view of universals and

other so-called abstract objects. Such a view, just intimated in Alsted's characterization

of *universale ante rem*, will be commended later under the exploration of *creatio ex

nihilo* in relation to divine simplicity.

Morris, for another example, talks of God having 'properties distinctive of deity'

and expands the notion of properties to include 'trivial properties' such as 'being such

that $2 + 2 = 4$'.[240] Here again essence appears to be reduced to a cluster of properties and,

moreover, the term 'property' is stretched to the point of distortion to encompass items

(such as mathematical truths) that are not accidents that follow on essence and are better

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[238] Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, pp. 1-12, 44-52, 152-76.
[239] Brower ('Making Sense of Divine Simplicity', pp. 7-8) notes Plantinga's affinity for Platonic realism.
[240] Morris, 'On God and Mann', pp. 313-14.

taken up in an account of the divine knowledge such as that which will be adumbrated

later in an exploration of *creatio ex nihilo* and its implications for divine simplicity.[241]

Yet, even if there are misunderstandings and false starts in the analytic

engagement of the doctrine of God, several authors do perceive differences between the

older and newer sensibilities in ontology. Hughes, for example, marks that Thomas'

view of accidents and properties is more restricted, while 'analytic philosophers are often

generous about what counts as a property.'[242] Wolterstorff, as we have seen, devotes an

entire essay to the matter, maintaining that the critical difference between Thomas and

contemporary metaphysics lies in Thomas working with a 'constitution ontology', which

makes the identity of God and his essence more plausible, while contemporary

philosophers work with a 'relation ontology' that centers on the exemplification of

(essential or accidental) properties and makes simplicity more puzzling.[243] These

observations merit several comments.

First, while it is helpful that differences are being perceived, this has not cleared

away all misunderstanding, and it does not automatically engender affirmation of a

traditional doctrine of divine simplicity. Hughes still takes the identity of God's essence

and existence to mean that God nonsensically has more of an 'on-off property' than

creatures, and he therefore disavows that identity. Richards, who follows Wolterstorff's

conclusions on the ontological differences, reads Thomas' identification of God's essence

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[241] Valicella ('Divine Simplicity', p. 518) asks, 'What do the truths of logic and arithmetic have to do with my essence or nature?' but still regards these as 'essential' (though not 'quidditative') properties.
[242] Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 8-9.
[243] Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity', pp. 100-1.

and existence as indicating merely that 'it is one of his essential properties that he necessarily exist' and thus on the wrong grounds commends the identification.[244]

Second, Wolterstorff's distinction between a constitution ontology and a relational ontology, whatever its historical accuracy and precise heuristic value,[245] invites further comment on the relationship between *essentia* and *ens* in a Thomistic Reformed orthodox metaphysic and on the question of whether this relationship does in fact make divine simplicity a more palatable and, at the same time, less remarkable teaching. In this connection, it should be noted that, in a hylomorphic substance such as a human being, *essentia* can be considered as *ens* in respect of what it is and in this sense can be predicated of or identified with a particular *ens*: *Sortes est homo*. But *essentia* can also be taken as that which constitutes a thing as what it is and in this sense cannot be predicated of or identified with a particular *ens*: *Sortes non est humanitas*.[246] The older ontology, then, does not encourage us, with all substances and all semantic scenarios of *essentia*, to identify a being with its essence. However, in *substantiae separatae* (substances separate from matter) such as angels and, indeed, God himself, because there is no matter that individuates, *essentia* taken even as strictly *forma* can be predicated of

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[244] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 220-2.

[245] For one critique, see Rogers, 'Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', p. 165-6n2. However, when Rogers chides Wolterstorff for claiming that Thomas views natures as concrete and thus for neglecting Thomas' Aristotelian convictions, she may miss what Wolterstorff is actually saying. Wolterstorff may be saying only that Thomas, over against the typical contemporary philosopher, considers natures in things to be instances of natures which exist beyond the things only *in ratione* instead of exemplifications suspended from an abstract object that actually exists *extra mentem*. In other words, Wolterstorff may be only confirming Aquinas' Aristotelianism.

[246] This is the distinction between *essentia essentiata* and *essentia essentians*.

and identified with the particular, which is its own *forma subsistens*.[247] Therefore, *pace*

Wolterstorff, within a Thomistic Reformed orthodox metaphysic it is not so that God 'is a

certain nature' '*like everything else*';[248] not everything is its nature in every sense of the

term and thus there is still something of distinctiveness and exigency conveyed in the

identity of God and his essence, even if angels as well as God may be called simple in

this sense. If we extend the purview to God's attributes (wisdom, holiness, and so on),

the poignancy of divine simplicity is even clearer. For, even if on an Aristotelian reading

of qualities as universals these objectively exist only *in rebus*, they still are other than the

things in which they exist and still actuate and compose the things in which they exist.

The identity of God and his attributes then secures that God, over against all other beings,

is not actuated and determined by things other than himself. In short, even in an

Aristotelian or, better, Thomistic Reformed orthodox ontology, divine simplicity can play

a critical role in differentiating God and creatures. All of this is to say that distinguishing

between older and newer ontologies does not force one to choose between affirming

divine simplicity as a mundane teaching (choosing an older ontology) or repudiating it

for fear of rendering God an abstract object (choosing a newer ontology).[249] Positively,

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[247] See Thomas, *De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 2, p. 373; cap. 4, p. 376; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 3, pp. 39-40; Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 7, p. 2022.
[248] Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity', p. 103 (emphasis added). To be sure, Wolterstorff does not say only that, in a constitution ontology, God is a certain nature 'like everything else'; he adds that God is different in that he has no accidents added ('Divine Simplicity', p. 101). But the point here is to deny the first statement (that in Thomas' theology God is a certain nature in the same way that everything else is) without negating the second (that in Thomas' theology God is unique in having no accidents added to himself).
[249] For more on an Aristotelian view of universals still doing justice to the uniqueness of the nature-suppositum identity in God, see below.

with Aristotelian sympathies, one can advocate simplicity as an intelligible claim and as corroborative of the Creator-creature distinction.

Third, after considering some implications of perpetuating a Thomistic Reformed orthodox metaphysic, it may be asked also whether adopting a 'relation ontology' truly is a pathway to leaving simplicity behind. It should be observed that the relation ontology cannot be granted the prerogative of setting the ontological stage and then judging whether divine simplicity remains workable. For these two (the so-called relation ontology and divine simplicity) are in reality two perspectives competing on the same plane to exegete the structure of reality. In other words, it will not do to assert that, given a Platonic relation ontology, simplicity becomes more difficult to uphold. The newer ontology must actually be defended before it can be deployed to preclude divine simplicity. And it is precisely one of the aims of this study to suggest that the teaching of Holy Scripture (materially and implicitly) compels us by the aseity of God and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* to reject Platonic realism about separate universals and to bring out the implications of God's aseity and *creatio ex nihilo* with the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Having sought to define the relationships between dogmatics and exegesis and dogmatics and metaphysics in the previous section and to respond to skepticism about the use of metaphysics in the general mood of contemporary theology, we have now sought to highlight ways in which a dogmatic approach to divine simplicity differs from the broadly characterized analytic approach. Here four things have been said. First, dogmatics endeavors to be driven, in content and *telos*, by Holy Scripture, requiring a foundation in Scripture for any rational distinction to be made, while the analytic

literature appears to be often adrift of Scripture and in the realm of speculation. Second, a dogmatic approach to the doctrine of God recognizes that reason is darkened by sin and therefore must be renewed by Scripture and the illumination of the Spirit, while the analytic literature in theology proper is less reserved as to the health and power of reason and does not so readily call upon Scripture to clarify divine things. Third, a dogmatic approach is intent on preserving the Creator-creature distinction, while analytic examinations of divine simplicity, even if they would theoretically affirm the Creator-creature distinction, tend explicitly or at least effectively to locate God within the created order and mistakenly insist on univocity in theological description. Fourth, the dogmatic approach ventured here takes up a Thomistic Reformed orthodox metaphysic for explicating biblical teaching and, in view of God's aseity and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, holds this metaphysic as a matter of theological principle, while prominent analytic investigations of simplicity reconceive various ontological notions and sometimes operate with a more Platonic ontology. With this methodological approach in hand, we turn to a brief sketch of the doctrine of divine simplicity that is to be developed here and offered as an alternative to recent theological reservations about divine simplicity and recent analytic treatments of the doctrine.

C. A Cartography of Divine Simplicity

At this juncture, the use of philosophical language becomes prominent, but this does not overturn the claim that divine simplicity is a doctrine that emerges from biblical exegesis. We recall that we are still speaking of the triune God of Scripture and that

metaphysical concepts are employed here, not magisterially, but ministerially and in order to set forth what is materially and implicitly already present in the scriptural portrayal of the living God. Further, after this sketch of divine simplicity, the statements made here are to be substantiated by exegetical and dogmatic reflection that intends to demonstrate how Holy Scripture elicits the claims of simplicity. In articulating divine simplicity, it is easiest to begin by expressing it negatively: *Simplex est, quod negat compositionem*.[250] However, simplicity enfolds both apophatic and cataphatic impulses in theological description, which will be evident here as it is outlined in ten points.

(1) God is pure act and is therefore not composed of act and potency. *Actus* can be taken as *essentia rei* or *actio et effectus rei*.[251] Phrased differently, it can be taken entitatively or formally as that in virtue of which a thing is what it is (*actus primus*). *Actus primus* then enables and governs operation (*actus secundus*).[252] Potency also has a twofold sense. It can be taken as *potentia passiva*, unrealized potential in virtue of which a thing is able to become or perish and to change and suffer. As such, it is *radix contingentiae*.[253] Alternatively, it can be taken as *potentia activa*, power in virtue of which a thing is able to act or effect change.[254] In view of the plenitude, immutability, and creative action of God, divine simplicity ascribes to God what *actus primus*, *actus secundus*, and *potentia activa* signify – essence, action, and power to act – and asserts

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[250] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 14, p. 135.
[251] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 2, p. 2016; cap. 15, p. 2036.
[252] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, pp. 120, 123-4. Essence taken absolutely is *actus*, while essence taken relatively in respect of existence is *in potentia*.
[253] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, pp. 125, 129; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 142.
[254] E.g., Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, p. 125.

that these are absolute and identical in God. Negatively, there is no *potentia passiva* in

God whereby his being might be enhanced or elevated to greater vigor or efficacy.

(2) God is entirely spiritual and is therefore not composed of corporeal parts.[255]

Given the testimony to the spiritual nature of God in Scripture (Jn. 4:24), this is relatively

uncontroversial and will not constitute a major emphasis in this work. Nevertheless, it is

worth mentioning that Owen, for example, was compelled to refute the Socinian notion

that God literally has bodily parts and shape and did so by exposing the logical

inconsistencies in this view, appealing to various strands of scriptural teaching, and

invoking the distinction between literal and proper speech about God and metaphorical

and improper speech about God to frame the anthropomorphic language in Scripture.[256]

(3) God is his own form (*deitas*) and is therefore not composed of matter and

form.[257] Again, if it is reasonably clear in Scripture that God is immaterial, then this

point may seem rather mundane, but the absence of matter-form composition in God

carries broader implications for the absence of composition. *Materia* can be taken

dupliciter: first as formless matter without actualization by form in a particular corporeal

substance in a given species (*materia prima*); second as matter informed and actualized

by form so as to constitute, together with form, a particular corporeal substance in a given

species (*materia secunda*).[258] *Forma* (or *forma specifica*) is that which shapes and

actualizes *materia prima* and so renders this *materia secunda* and constitutes a substance

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[255] Corporeal parts, with respect to extension and quantity, are also called integral parts. See Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 15, p. 2036; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 17, p. 152.

[256] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, in vol. 12 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966), III, pp. 98-107.

[257] Matter and form in corporeal substances are called essential parts.

[258] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 15, p. 2036; Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 15, p. 158.

as what it is and in its species.[259] While form is that which gives existence to a thing, it is

received in and contracted and individuated by matter.[260] Therefore, in corporeal

substances, in which matter and form constitute the concrete quiddity of a being, nothing

is identical with its own form taken as an essential part.[261] However, in incorporeal

substances in which the form awaits no individuation by matter, the form itself is

subsisting and hence the individual is *sua forma subsistens*.

(4) Therefore, as immaterial, God is his own divinity subsisting and is therefore

not composed of nature and suppositum or individual. So Thomas: 'And so, because God

is not composed of matter and form…it is proper that God should be his own deity.'[262]

But there are other reasons that God should be regarded as his own divinity subsisting.

Essentia is *primum principium entis internum* and can be taken as *essentia essentians*,

which determines and perfects *ens*, as well as *essentia essentiata* ('nothing other than

form in matter, that is, the composite itself').[263] Insofar as God himself is the condition

of his own completeness and abundance and is not determined, perfected, or caused *ab

alio*, it is crucial to hold that God is *ipsa deitas subsistens* (as *deitas essentians* and *deitas

essentiata*) and to deny that God is composed of nature and suppositum, which

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[259] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 16, p. 165.

[260] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 15, p. 164. There is a parallel here with the relationship between essence and existence. Though essence is the first act of a being, it is also received and limited in existence, which may itself, in a certain sense, be said to be received and limited in essence.

[261] There is thus an objective distinction between the individual and its form. While this can be loosely called a 'real distinction', it should be qualified with the recognition that the distinction is not, strictly speaking, between two *res* as the form or essence here is not *res per se* but rather *principium rei*. Further, against Platonic realism about separate universals, the form or essence here can be separated from the thing only *in ratione*.

[262] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 3, p. 40.

[263] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3, pp. 43-4.

underscores his aseity and avoids any notion of him being *Deus per participationem*.[264]

Further, if individuation occurs by existence and God's nature is his existence (see

below), he is, once more, not composed of nature and suppositum or individual.[265]

(5) God is really identical with each of the persons of the Trinity and is not

composed by them. In the reverse, each of the persons is really identical with God

subsisting in a certain manner. This is emphatically not a denial of the doctrine of the

Trinity; rather, it is a repudiation of a certain way or certain ways in which the triune life

might be thought to be structured. As we have seen already, the church fathers, the initial

architects of the catholic doctrine of the Trinity, found divine simplicity to be a vital

concept in trinitarian dogma.[266] However, some recent proposals in the analytic literature

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[264] Cf. Jerome Zanchi, *De Natura Dei, seu de Divinis Attributis, Libri V* (Neostadium, 1598), lib. 2, cap. 2, qu. 1, p. 85.

[265] Thomas emphasizes that individuation occurs by way of matter, in which case it might be possible for even created incorporeal substances such as angels to be identical with angelic nature. For these are not individuated by matter and might then be their own subsisting forms. However, he also discerns that 'in all created things nature constitutes the suppositum. But nothing constitutes itself' (*Questiones Quodlibetales*, in vol. 9 of *Opera Omnia* [Parma, 1859], II, qu. 2, art. 4 [2], corp., p. 475). Further, though in creatures *esse* is not 'determinative of essence itself, it nevertheless pertains to a suppositum'. Therefore, 'suppositum and nature are not in every way the same' (*Questiones Quodlibetales*, II, qu. 2, art. 2, ad 2, p. 476). On this see, Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 246-53; Dolezal, *God without Parts*, pp. 54-5. In this connection, Keckermann calls *existentia* the *principium individuationis* and that which 'produces singularity' (*Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 2, p. 2016). Alsted, (*Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 4, pp. 46-7) agrees and writes that *existentia* is *forma individuifica*. There are, then, four distinct reasons to conclude that God is *ipsa deitas subsistens* without individuation: (1) God is spiritual and without matter; (2) God accounts for himself without any *principium entis* other than himself that might govern what he is; (3) God's essence is identical to his existence; and (4) God is identical with his own attributes and not composed of substance and accidents (which serve to individuate). Apart from the first reason, the others underline the difference between the *simplicitas comparativa* of created *substantiae separatae* and the *simplicitas absoluta* of God. Compare Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 2, p. 210; VII, qu. 2, 4, p. 597.

[266] The point has been made recently in Holmes, *Holy Trinity*, pp. 56-146.

suggest that God is composed of parts which are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or at least that the three persons are distinct from one another in such a way that divine simplicity is no longer tenable.[267] Yet it is contended here that the traditional doctrine of God's simplicity aids in avoiding pitfalls in the formulation of trinitarian teaching and that it promotes a right conception of the distinctions and interrelations among the Father, Son, and Spirit.

(6) God, who is his own essence, is identical with his own existence also. This is not reducible to the claim that God necessarily exists or necessarily has the property of existence. It is, rather, truly an assertion of the objective identity of God's essence and existence. However, it is not for that reason an absurdity. When one does not acknowledge God's transcendence of the field of common reality and insists that the concept of existence as it functions in the creaturely realm should govern the sense of the identity of God and his essence and existence, then the assertion of identity naturally becomes problematic. However, when one recognizes that God is extrinsic to that field and then embraces the analogical tenor of theological language, the claim of the identity of God and his existence appears, not as a nonsensical way of describing God, but as a radical (but still analogical and intelligible) reorientation of the concept of existence in service to theological description. Here God does not conform to the dynamics of creaturely *esse*; rather, the concept of *esse* bends to the aseity and abundance of God and

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[267] See William Lane Craig, 'Toward a Tenable Social Trinitarianism', in Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (eds.), *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 95-9. For a helpful summary of analytic hypotheses on the doctrine of the Trinity, see Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 11-55.

this then effects a chastening of *esse*: it has no ultimacy or autonomy but is, in its

primordiality, *ipse Deus abundans* who makes himself known in Holy Scripture.

(7) God transcends classification and demarcation and is therefore not composed

of genus and species. Genus and species in the study of creaturely being are,

respectively, essence conceived *ambigue* and *imperfecte* and essence conceived *proxime*

and *perfecte*.[268] Genus relates to species as potency to act, being contracted and actuated

by species *in ratione*. But, Thomas argues in *Summa Theologiae*, there is no composition

of potency and act in God even *secundum intellectum*.[269] He also notes here that the

absence of composition of genus and species in God can be deduced from the absence of

composition of essence and existence. In this project, however, the denial of genus-

species composition in God centers on his uniqueness. While drawing from the notion

that God is *actus purus* is a legitimate move in negating genus-species composition in

God, there is a more straightforward move from his uniqueness to the negation of genus-

species composition: 'because God is above every genus, nor in him is a common nature

put which is restricted by difference.'[270] This dimension of divine simplicity is brought

out particularly in the section below on God's singularity.

(8) God is identical with each of his own attributes. In the reverse, each of God's

attributes is God himself viewed under a certain aspect. Negatively, God is not

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[268] See Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars 1, cap. 1, p. 2014. Cf. Maccovius: *forma specifica continet in se genericam* (*Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 16, p. 166).
[269] Aquinas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 5, p. 43. Turretin observes that this is a denial of *compositio logica* (*Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 5, p. 210).
[270] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 5, p. 210. Again, God is οὐσία ὑπερούσιος (Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, pp. 142, 145; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 22, p. 104). See also Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 310.

composed of substance and accidents. *Substantia* here indicates, not that God stands

under and receives accidents, but only that he subsists *per se* and not *in alio*.[271]

Accidentia are *entia secundaria* and do not have *esse* or *subsistere* but must exist in

substances and thus have only *inesse*. One pertinent division of *accidens* is *qualitas*, 'by

which something is denominated such [*quale*]'.[272] In accepting *substantia* as an

analogically viable descriptor of God while denying that there are *accidentia* or *qualitates*

in God, the intention is not to deny the faithfulness of God, the love of God, and so on. It

is, instead, a matter of identifying these as *schemata ipsius Dei*, characterizations of God

himself in the fullness of his being. So Polanus: 'The properties of God are not parts of

the divine essence, but any essential property is the entire [*tota*] and whole [*integra*]

essence of God itself.'[273] Here would-be abstract universals such as wisdom or goodness

purportedly 'exemplified' by God and thought to function as God's attributes, and even

would-be impersonal qualities thought to exist just in God, are denied ontological

primacy. There are no such abstract universals informing God's being; there is just *ipse*

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[271] McCormack ('Actuality of God', pp. 221-2) serves as an excellent example of recent misrepresentations of how the concept of substance actually functions in older Christian treatments of God. *Substantia* in the authors drawn from here has only a particular and narrow role to play in giving an account of God, and it is by no means conducive to a portrayal of God as inactive. Compare William Alston, 'Substance and the Trinity', in Stephen T. Davis et al. (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 179-201.
[272] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 4, p. 257.
[273] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 7, p. 141. Still, even in view of God's simplicity, both abstract and concrete forms of the divine attributes are apropos. The former (goodness, love, and so on) call to mind the simplicity and perfection of the divine nature, while the latter (good, loving, and so on) reiterate that God himself is not an abstraction but rather subsisting (Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 10; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 141)

Deus sapiens, *ipse Deus omnipotens*, whose self-revelation oversees the filling in of the content of these attributes.[274]

(9) God is wholly himself and not susceptive of any composition at all. After denying various kinds of composition in God, Thomas in *Summa Theologiae* offers the summative affirmation that *Deus sit omnino simplex*.[275] Here the Angelic Doctor analyses the very nature of composition itself and concludes that it is incompatible with who God is. In particular, the composite depends on its parts, while God depends on nothing to be who he is and act as he does. In addition, the union of parts itself requires a prior cause, but God is the first cause and has no predecessor who might achieve this union for him. This line of reasoning will be expounded especially in consideration of divine aseity.

(10) Finally, while God is fully himself and incomposite in himself, he is also not adjoined to other things so that he might become part of a composite. This is the heart of the final article in the question on simplicity in *Summa Theologiae*: 'the first cause rules all things, otherwise it would be mingled with these.'[276] Mastricht elaborates: 'Nor, by

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[274] As Barth often quips, in the doctrine of the divine attributes, the subject determines the predicate (e.g., *CD*, II/1, p. 493). While Barth unfortunately believes that this sentiment stands in contrast to Reformed orthodox treatments of the attributes, the statement itself is a useful reminder that, if we identify the attributes with God himself, his revelation (rather than any human *a priori*) has the final word as to the content and historical enactment of each attribute. See also Oliphint: 'if God is identical with his properties, it may be (and in fact is the case) that, rather than God being a property, the "property" is first of all a person, or perso*nal*, and only afterward a property.' Thus Plantinga and others wrongly reverse the 'conceptual priority' (*God with Us*, pp. 68-9). Compare Leftow, 'Is God an Abstract Object?', p. 593; Brian Davies, 'Simplicity', in Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 37-9.
[275] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 7, pp. 46-7. Compare van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6,
[276] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 8, pp. 47-8 (quoting Aristotle in *De Causis*).

simplicity, is God lacking in all composition merely within himself, but also he enters no

ordinary composition outside himself. For by [composition], any part composing is

presupposed to be more imperfect than the whole.'[277] In addition, the *compositio*

extraordinaria left open for the doctrine of the incarnation is not a proper composition. It

is, in Turretin's words,

> by hypostatic union, by which the Word indeed has assumed a human nature in
> one hypostasis, but he is not composed with it as part with part. But he has
> himself toward it as perfecting and sustaining, toward some essential adjunct to be
> perfected and sustained, so that the human nature thence indeed is perfected, but
> nothing on that account accedes to the divine nature.[278]

In sum, the doctrine of divine simplicity denies that God is composed of either

partes proprie dictae (corporeal or integral parts and matter and form or essential parts)

or *partes improprie dictae* (act and potency, nature and suppositum, essence and

existence, genus and difference, and substance and accidents).[279] Indeed, it denies that he

might be in any way composed of parts or enter into the composition of other things.

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[277] van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 22, p. 104.

[278] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 7, p. 211. By proceeding on the basis of a misunderstanding of the ascription of 'properties' to God (see above and the discussion in chapter five) and assuming an effectively Eutychian Christology, R. T. Mullins ('Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 [2013], p. 201) argues that 'being simple (having no properties) is incompatible with the *communicatio idiomatum*. This places divine simplicity in direct conflict with any adequate Christology.' Leaving aside the matter of 'properties' in the divine nature, it must be said that the simplicity of God and of God the Son *secundum deitatem* is not in any way called into question by the Son's assumption of a human nature with its sundry properties. For the two natures remain distinct from one another. To argue that the Godhead receives various properties from the humanity is arguably to lapse into a Eutychian configuration of the person and natures of Christ. Indeed, even the dogmaticians of Lutheran orthodoxy, while accepting the *genus majesticum* of the Christological *communicatio*, rejected the *genus tapeinoticum* and, as we have seen in the case of Quenstedt, for example, still affirmed the doctrine of divine simplicity.

[279] The taxonomy is outlined in Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 17, p. 152. Compare Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 10, pp. 87-8; Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 13, p. 227.

Therefore, simplicity distinguishes not only between God and corporeal substances by negating composition of integral or essential parts in God but also between God and separate or incorporeal substances such as angels or human souls by negating composition of even improper parts in God. While angels, for example, may be considered simple *secundum quid* or *comparative*, they are yet composed of act and potency, nature and suppositum, essence and existence, and substance and accidents. God alone is simple *absolute*, excluding all kinds of composition.[280] Again, while *spiritus creati* have a *simplicitas participata* and *restricta*, the simplicity of God is *omnimoda* and *originalis*.[281] However, the absoluteness of God's simplicity and the exclusion of all kinds of composition do not preclude the possibility of all distinctions in the doctrine of God. While genus-species can be considered (at least) a *compositio logica* that should be denied of God, divine simplicity takes no issue with logical distinction *per se*.[282] Indeed, in response to the objection that simplicity leads to nominalism about the divine attributes, it will be argued subsequently that rational distinctions are not just permissible but, when characterized properly, vital in theology proper. In fact, though simplicity does exclude real distinctions *secundum rem absolutam*

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[280] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 2, p. 210; VII, qu. 2, 4, p. 597.
[281] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologiae*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 20, p. 103. A number of authors have drawn attention to the fact that the Thomistic differentiation between God and creatures via essence-existence identity in God and essence-existence composition in creatures represents a monumental transcendence of Aristotelian metaphysics. See, e.g., Owens, 'Aristotle and Aquinas', pp. 48-53.
[282] In this connection, it is interesting to note that while Thomas (*ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 5, corp. p. 43) urges that 'nothing is prior in God, neither according to the thing, nor according to intellect,' Mastricht, for example, is quite comfortable with positing order in God *in ratione* (*Theoretico-Practica Theologiae*, lib. 2, cap. 5, 7, p. 94).

(the essence), it is still amenable to real distinctions *secundum rem relativam* (one divine

person in relation to another).[283]

The content of the doctrine of divine simplicity is often fleshed out in a largely

apophatic manner. So Turretin's summation: 'God's simplicity is his incommunicable

attribute, by which the divine nature is conceived by us, not only as lacking in all

composition and division, but also incapable of componibility and divisibility.'[284] All the

same, there are flashes of the cataphatic in this divine attribute. This is evident when one

marks, with Alsted, that God is not *imum simplex* (which 'lacks in all things') but rather

summum simplex (which 'lacks in nothing').[285] Inferred from such attributes as the

singularity, aseity, and immutability of God, divine simplicity affirms that in his

abundance, perfection, and absoluteness God is pure act, mightily alive, and identical

with all the fullness that he has and is in himself, which claim then constitutes the inner

theological *ratio* of the aforementioned attributes.[286]

In what follows, I will argue that the doctrine of divine simplicity in its various

aspects is rooted in and demanded by the biblical portrayal of God. One strategy for

developing and defending this teaching is to discern, especially from the Christian

doctrine of creation, that God has no passive potency in himself but is wholly *actus*, and

then to elucidate how this excludes composition in God and requires that God be identical

with all that is in God. Without at all disparaging this approach, the present undertaking

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[283] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 28, art. 3, p. 324. Alternatively, Turretin writes that simplicity allows for a *distinctio realis minor* (*inter rem & modum rei, vel inter modos ipsos*) (*Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 27, 11, pp. 307-8).
[284] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 3, p. 210.
[285] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 14, p. 135.
[286] Dolezal's recent defense of simplicity takes a similar line in proposing that God's simplicity confirms the absoluteness with which God is the 'the entirely sufficient explanation for himself' (*God without Parts*, p. 1).

travels a slightly different path and argues that exegetically grounded, discursive considerations of certain divine attributes imply that there is no composition in God and that God is wholly *actus* and identical with all the perfection and fullness that are in God. Accordingly, we now traverse a series of divine attributes and their implications for divine simplicity, forming a positive case for simplicity with an eye to meeting the different objections seen in recent systematic theology and analytic philosophy.

III.   An Exegetico-Dogmatic Case for Divine Simplicity (I)

A.   'The Lᴏʀᴅ our God, the Lᴏʀᴅ is one': Divine Singularity and Divine Simplicity

In this chapter on ways in which two of God's attributes entail his simplicity, we

will look first at divine singularity. Here exegetical tracings of the scope of God's

sovereignty, the relative (*ad alterum*) descriptions of God in contradistinction to the gods

of the nations, and the occasional absolute (*ad se*) and positive descriptions of God in

himself as the only God are drawn together to search out the character of God's

singularity. Though these threads are somewhat artificially considered in distinction

from one another, this approach has at least some organizational value. From here, the

movement from exegetical comment on various texts to dogmatic elaboration guides us

to the claims of the doctrine of God's simplicity.

i.   Biblical Teaching

The theme of the universal scope of God's sovereignty begins with the creation

account in Genesis 1, which is, *inter alia,* an implicit spurning of the polytheistic

theogonies on offer in the ancient Near East, opening with the simple statement that 'in

the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (1:1).

> [W]e have overemphasized the similarities between Gen 1 and the other ancient
> cosmogonies without fully appreciating the differences. This text soars above
> them in such a way as to deny implicitly any possibility of the theologies
> expressed in Egyptian or Mesopotamian accounts. If we consider it an
> ideological polemic, we must admit that it is not specifically so and only
> indirectly. It contains no theomachy, or cosmic conflict among the gods, or

victory enthronement motif. Both are excluded by 'in the beginning when God created…'! Israel's God has no rivals. There can be no struggle with forces opposed to his actions or corresponding to his power. There can be no victory enthronement motif because God's victory was never in doubt; rather, God has never not been enthroned. There can be no enthronement portrait here because God has not become sovereign; he has simply never been less than sovereign.[287]

As God makes, separates, and names by sheer *fiat*, he demonstrates himself to be the Lord of all the spheres of reality (1:2-25).[288] Of course, the narration of the creation of humanity in 1:26 recounts God speaking in the plural (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם), but, Gordon Wenham observes, 'Gen 1 is distinctly antimythological in its thrust.' It therefore opposes 'ancient Near Eastern views of creation', and 'modern commentators are quite agreed that Gen 1:26 could never have been taken by the author of this chapter in a polytheistic sense.'[289] Suggestions for interpretation, then, include that 'God is surrounded by His angelic host,' in which case '[t]his is the Israelite version of the polytheistic assemblies of the pantheon – monotheized and depaganized,' or that perhaps this plural form signals God's immanent fullness, self-deliberation, or self-exhortation.[290]

As corruption intensifies throughout the earth, Yahweh takes it upon himself to restructure all of human existence by the flood and Noahic covenant (6:1-9:17) and then ultimately to bless all peoples through one man, Abram, and his descendents (12:1-3). When the mysterious priest Melchizedek appears in chapter 14, he blesses the God of

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[287] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 32.
[288] So, e.g., Bruce Waltke (*Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], p. 56): 'Naming…is an indication of dominion.'
[289] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), p. 28.
[290] The quote is from Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadephia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 12. The options are helpfully delineated in Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 27-8; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 132-4.

Abram as 'the Most High' (אֵל עֶלְיוֹן) and as the 'Maker' or 'Possessor' (קֹנֵה) of the heavens and the earth (14:19).[291] Later in the book of Genesis, yet another glimpse of the universality of God's sovereignty is given in the story of Joseph, wherein God orchestrates a famine in the mighty land of Egypt and at the same time preserves that land and the people of Jacob by way of Joseph's unlikely rise to power (41:28-32; 45:5-8; 50:20).

In the period of the divided kingdom with the threat of Assyrian oppression looming over Judah, Hezekiah prays to Yahweh as both the 'God of Israel' and 'the God alone (הָאֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ) to all of the kingdoms of the earth' (2 Kings 19:15; cf. Isa. 37:14-20).[292] In the Psalms God reigns over all the nations, though they may claim otherwise about their own deities and rulers, and judges them in righteousness (Ps. 2:1-12; 9:5-8, 15-20; 33:10-17; 96:7-13). The Psalmists therefore invite all the peoples to bow before God in awe and praise (67:1-7; 99:1-3; 148:1-14).[293] This is echoed in the prophecy of Isaiah as the worship of Yahweh is extended to Egypt and Assyria (Isa. 19:19-25).

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[291] On the semantic shades of the verb קָנָה in Genesis 14:19, 22, see, e.g., E. Lipinski, 'קָנָה', in G. Johannes Botterweck et al. (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 13, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 62-3.

[292] In his commentary on Isaiah, Campegius Vitringa marks 'the reign of God to be universal, while to their own gods, or the demons which they worship for gods, all the peoples everywhere attribute a particular reign. His reign is single, true, and one, indeed only God presides over all things' (*Commentarius in Librum Prophetiarum Jesaiae, Pars Posterior* [Herbornae Nassaviorum, 1722], cap. XXXVII, vs. 17, pp. 378-79). For recent concurrence, see Christopher Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 248-50.

[293] 'Israel's singers knew well that the unexplained choice of a unique people was conditioned by an ulterior purpose: happiness for all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3)….With utmost joy, the psalmists recited the fabulous events through which the Hebrew ancestors were invested with worldwide responsibility' (Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003], p. 49).

Surprisingly, Yahweh is able to anoint and send Cyrus, king of a pagan land, to execute his will in subduing nations and enabling the people of God to return to Jerusalem (44:28-45:4). Thus, Yahweh invites the peoples, whose gods cannot save, to repent and inherit salvation (45:20-25). Toward the end of Isaiah's prophecy, Yahweh declares himself to be the eschatological light who illumines the world for Israel and calls upon the peoples either to serve Israel or face destruction (60:1-22). Even as the Israelites are under Babylonian government, Daniel exalts God as the one who reigns over history and removes and enthrones kings (Dan. 2:21). Even the proud Nebuchadnezzar says of God the Most High that he executes his will in heaven and on earth with no one to question or impede him (4:34-35).

In the New Testament, Paul's speech at the Areopagus accentuates the universality of God's dominion by calling him 'the God who made the world and all things in it' and 'the Lord of heaven and earth' who made every nation of human beings and fixed the boundaries of their existence in time and space (Acts 17:24-26). In the epistle to the Romans, God is the one to whom the entire world is accountable (3:19) and the one who oversees the justification of Jew and Gentile alike (3:29-30). The unfathomably wise and sovereign plan of God encompasses both the ingrafting of the Gentiles and the salvation of Israel, all redounding to the glory of God (11:1-36). Finally, the absolute catholicity of God's sovereignty is repeated throughout the book of Revelation. Visions of the heavenly throne reveal unqualified, ceaseless worship of God (and God in Christ) alone who reigns in creation, redemption, and judgment (4:1-5:14). Later the elders fall before God for his overcoming the nations in wrath and judgment

and rewarding the prophets and saints (11:15-18). God is the 'king of the nations' and receives the worship of all nations (15:3-4).[294]

The distinction between God and the gods of the nations has already been broached, but we may consider it more directly in the book of Deuteronomy. In chapter four, Moses supplies the rationale for obedience to God by reminding Israel that God brought them out of Egypt so that they might know that 'Yahweh, he is God' and that 'there is no other beside him' (אֵין עוֹד מִלְבַדּוֹ) (4:35). Again, 'Yahweh, he is God in the heavens above and upon the earth below' and 'there is no other' (אֵין עוֹד) (4:39). Because Yahweh is the only true God, the Decalogue commands that Israel should not have other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) before or beside him (5:7).[295] Because Yahweh is not just one God among many but is the 'God of gods' (אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים), Israel must circumcise their hearts and submit to him (10:16-17). Previously Israel made sacrifices to demons which were a 'no-god' (לֹא אֱלֹהַּ), 'gods they did not know', 'new ones who recently came' (32:17). They provoked Yahweh with 'no-god' (בְּלֹא־אֵל) and with their idols (32:21). Against such false deities and false practices, Yahweh emphasizes, 'I, I am he, and there is no god beside me' (עִמָּדִי) (32:39).

Such themes are amplified in the book of Isaiah. Numerous times the gods of the nations are reduced to mere 'idols' and 'images' produced by human hands, and these are forcefully depicted as lifeless, unable to move, speak, or save (19:1; 21:9; 31:7; 37:18-19;

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[294] As G. K. Beale wisely comments (*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999], pp. 797-8), in the face of ongoing rebellion against God and of the final judgment of God, the 'all' here does not mean that '"all without exception" will worship the true God but '"all" without distinction'.
[295] Gordon McConville points out that Deuteronomy 4 'anticipates the First Commandment' (*Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary [Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002], p. 112).

40:19; 41:21-29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:6-7; 48:5; 57:13). The theogonies of the ancient Near East posited the formation of multiple gods, but before Yahweh 'no god was formed' and after him 'no god will be' (43:10).[296] Yahweh made the heavens and the earth and before him these are nothing (40:12-26). Strikingly, then, he is the one who made those who make the idols (Isa. 17:7-8). Underscoring that he alone can tell what is to come and can inexorably accomplish his purposes, God queries, 'Who is like me?' (44:6-8; 46:5, 9-11).

However, a number of authors contend that, even in its *prima facie* monotheistic moments, the Old Testament does not envisage the God of Israel to be the only deity in existence.[297] For Moberly, Deuteronomy 4 should not be made to answer the question 'Do any deities other than YHWH in any way exist?'. For, if this passage were intended to provide such an answer, the Hebrew would not read אֵין עוֹד but rather אֵין אַחֵר. Yet, Moberly argues, the existence of אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים is actually presupposed in the warnings against the pursuit of other gods (e.g., 5:7; 6:14; 17:2-5). Therefore, the statement אֵין עוֹד asserts something like 'there is nowhere else to go.' It is not that 'alternatives are as such non-existent', but rather that 'to look elsewhere than to YHWH is misguided and futile.' There are other deities that present themselves as appealing alternatives, and it is in precisely such a milieu that a claim like אֵין עוֹד is uttered to hearten the people of God.[298]

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[296] See Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 123; John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005), p. 203.

[297] For example, Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Moberly, 'How Appropriate Is "Monotheism" as a Category for Biblical Interpretation?', pp. 216-34.

[298] Moberly, 'How Appropriate Is "Monotheism" as a Category for Biblical Interpretation?', p. 230.

Likewise, not all exegetes are convinced that Isaiah so decisively annuls the existence of other deities. Moberly points out that in 46:9 'there is no god again' (אֵין עוֹד אֱלֹהִים) is glossed by 'and none like me'. For Moberly, Isaiah does not deny that other gods exist but only that other gods can compare to Yahweh. Moreover, Babylon makes such a claim about itself in 47:8, 10, and surely, Moberly suggests, Babylon does not mean that 'other great cities did not in fact exist but rather that other cities were insignificant in comparison with Babylon.'[299]

In response to Moberly, it is not obvious that the Hebrew אֵין עוֹד in Deuteronomy 4 does not have the same force that אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִם would have. If there is no god 'again' or 'in addition', this is materially the same as 'there is no other god.'[300] Further, one cannot resolve the tension between Yahweh's being the true deity and the simultaneous recognition of other gods by consigning the theological meaning of the claim אֵין עוֹד to the moral or existential realm so that it concerns only the monolatrous obligations of the people. For, in Deuteronomy itself, the difference between Yahweh and the other gods is not merely that Yahweh is the one to whom Israel can and should turn but that Yahweh is in reality the only one who is uncreated, can see and hear, can take a nation out of the clutches of an empire with signs and wonders and establish that nation elsewhere by displacing mighty peoples (Deut. 4:28, 34, 38). He is the only one who can truly protect a people, kill and vivify, wound and heal (32:37-39). As Moberly himself ultimately acknowledges, the difference between Yahweh and other gods is not reducible to human

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[299] Moberly, 'How Appropriate Is "Monotheism" as a Category for Biblical Interpretation?', p. 230.

[300] Compare the use of עוֹד in Genesis 19:12; 43:6; Amos 6:10. Since Deuteronomy 4:35, 39 concerns God as God and not under some other determination, the repetition or continuation in the word עוֹד respects deity and has the sense of 'there is no god again' or 'there is no god in addition.'

religious obligation and allegiance but is objective and evinced in the vigor and power of

Yahweh in contrast to the impotence of the other gods. The other gods may exist 'in the

faith of other nations', but they are reduced in Deuteronomy to non-entities or, at most, to

entities that are not truly divine.[301] As Turretin puts it, the God of Scripture is the only

God *secundum esse* and *proprie*, though others may be 'gods' λεγομένως and *secundum*

dici.[302]

Isaiah's exposure of the disparity between Israel's God and the other gods also

suggests that the others' divine status is merely putative. As we have seen, this disparity

in Isaiah turns on the objective fact that the other gods are idols which are created and

lifeless entities, unable to move, speak, save, or tell what is to come (31:7; 37:18-19;

40:19; 41:21-29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; 45:20; 46:6-7; 48:5; 57:13). That these cannot

compare to Yahweh entails that they are really no gods at all; they are gods only

λεγομένως. A similar dynamic is at work in the (false and hubristic) claim of Babylon:

the greatness of Babylon so shames the alleged greatness of other nations and cities that

one is encouraged to wonder whether they are truly great nations and cities at all. These

nations may exist, but, according to Babylon, they have no rightful claim to political

eminence. For Isaiah, then, while other gods may in some sense exist, they do not exist

as legitimate claimants to deity. In the face of contemporary trends in biblical

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[301] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 143. John Goldingay (*Old Testament Theology, Volume One: Israel's Gospel* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Paternoster: Milton Keyes, 2003], p. 46) writes that 'there is only one being who is really entitled to be described as "God", though [the First Testament] sometimes gives the courtesy title "gods" to other heavenly beings.'
[302] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 3, 4, p. 199. To elaborate, the proposition 'other gods exist' is false whether the subject has no referent or the subject does not resonate with the denotation of the subject.

scholarship that urge caution in speaking of 'monotheism' in the Old Testament, it is important not to understate the biblical authors' cognizance of and recurring testimony to Yahweh being the only true God and deliverer and the only one to be feared, believed, and praised in contrast to the other so-called gods.

In the New Testament, Paul writes candidly of the non-existence of other gods or idols. He affirms what appears to be an axiom of the Corinthian church, 'that no idol is in the world and that no god is but one' (1 Cor. 8:4).[303] To be sure, there may be many 'so-called gods' (λεγόμενοι θεοὶ) in heaven and on earth (8:5). Yet, Paul writes in a Christologically-expanded version of the Shema, 'for us there is one God the Father from whom are all things…and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things' (8:6).[304] If the 'for us' (ἡμῖν) at the beginning of 8:6 has the appearance of a reversion to henotheism, the apostle follows with the observation that the oneness of God and of Christ's lordship is not 'knowledge among all' (8:7a), implying that this oneness is not merely a subjective theological preference but rather a liberating truth that ought to be embraced by all human beings. It is by sheer 'custom' that some eat idol meat as though really belonging to an idol and thus suffer the defilement of conscience (8:7b).

Later in 1 Corinthians Paul takes the history of Israel in the Old Testament as a warning against idolatry and disobedience (10:1-13). In subsequent exhortation, he pointedly reiterates the singularity of God in demonstrating the irreconcilability of

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[303] As Richard Hays points out (*First Corinthians*, Interpretation [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993], p. 139), the problem that Paul addresses here lies not with the slogan of the Corinthian church but with their application of it.

[304] On this text and its connection to the Old Testament confession of God's oneness, see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 120-36; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: 2008), pp. 210-18.

partaking at the table of the Lord and at the table of demons. The bread and cup of the Lord's Supper are a participation in the body and blood of Christ (10:14-17), while those partaking of the sacrifices in Israel were participants in the altar (10:18). However, while one might expect Paul then to say straightforwardly that those partaking of pagan sacrifices are participants of competing deities, he clarifies that an idol is not 'something' (τί) (10:19). Instead, pagan sacrifices are actually offered to demons (10:20-22). The non-existence of other gods in 8:4-7 is not reneged here but rather augmented with the note that idolatrous worship is a venue of demonic activity.[305] God's singularity appears in the epistle to the Galatians also. Paul writes that when these believers did not know God, they were enslaved 'to ones who by nature (φύσει) are not gods' (4:8). Again, the distinction between the God of Jesus Christ and others gods is not merely ethnic or subjective but essential and objective.[306]

A third family of texts asserts God's singularity absolutely or *quoad se*. The Shema is the preeminent example: 'Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one' (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד) (Deut. 6:4). As Moberly persuasively argues, the phrase יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ is appositional, and the implicit copulative verb should be located between יְהוָה and אֶחָד, giving rise to the translation 'Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one' and entailing that the Shema principally communicates something about God himself rather than just God's claim on Israel (as it would be in 'Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone') (cf. Zech. 14:9;

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[305] On holding together both the non-existence of pagan gods as mere 'social constructs' and the presence of the demonic in idolatry, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), pp. 775-6.

[306] Cf., e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), p. 179; Ben Witherington, III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 297.

Mark 12:29).[307] Insofar as God's singularity is a predominant theme in Deuteronomy,

and insofar as the Shema is a 'theoretical restatement' of the first two commandments, it

is likely that the oneness of Yahweh here respects his uniqueness as the only true God.[308]

Of course, this need not exclude the possibility that the Shema declares the oneness of

God in respect of his integrity and self-consistency as well. As the dependability of

Yahweh also is a noteworthy theme in Deuteronomy (5:1-6; 7:6-8:20; 10:20-11:7), there

may be reason to believe that in the Shema two dimensions of God's unity, his singularity

or uniqueness and his integrity or self-sameness, are intermingled for the consolidation of

Israel's faith.[309]

In the Gospel of John, Jesus confesses the Father to be 'the only God' and 'the

only true God' (5:44; 17:3). Yet, arguably, Jesus himself also is called 'the true God' in

1 John 5:20.[310] Significantly, the articular τοῦ θεοῦ appears in 5:19 without respect to

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[307] R. W. L. Moberly, 'Yahweh Is One: The Translation of the Shema', in J. A. Emerton, ed., *Studies in the Pentateuch*, Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 213-14. *Pace*, e.g., Norbert Lohfink and Jan Bergman, 'אֶחָד', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, rev. ed., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 196; Daniel I. Block, 'How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004), p. 212.

[308] Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 328. Cf. Patrick D. Miller, 'The Most Important Word: The Yoke of the Kingdom', *Iliff Review* 41 (1984), p. 18.

[309] For the view that אֶחָד here concerns God's integrity or constancy, see J. G. Janzen, 'On the Most Important Word in the Shema', *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987), pp. 280-300. On the possibility that it may concern both the uniqueness and integrity of God, see S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1903), p. 90; Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 99-101; Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), p. 96.

[310] For the view that the referent of οὗτος in 5:20b is τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ in 5:20a, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 625-6.

any of the distinct divine *hypostaseis* or perhaps with respect to the Father and then again in 5:20a with respect to the Father. Thus, if Jesus is called ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς with the article in 5:20b, then, while he is not the Father, he and the Father are the same God (cf. John 10:30). In other words, the existence of only one true God in Johannine theology is not in undermined by a boldness in enunciating Christ's divinity. Romans 3:30 has already been mentioned in treating the universality of God's sovereignty, but it also contains the statement that 'one is God' before discussing his justification of both Jew and Gentile. This text confirms that there is only one God who oversees both Jew and Gentile and that God's plan for the justification of both is a consistent one. Accordingly, like the Shema, this text may have overtones of both the singularity or uniqueness of God and the integrity of God or lack of division in God. First Corinthians 8 also has been considered already, but it bears revisiting as 8:6 announces positively that 'there is one God from whom are all things…and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things.' As in the Johannine literature, there is no contradiction between the strict singularity of God and the confession of Christ as Lord and, at least implicitly, as God. The identity and immanent fullness of the one God include the person of Christ (cf. Rom. 9:5; Eph. 4:4-6; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13). As in a number of Old Testament texts (Deut. 4:28; Ps. 96:5; Isa. 31:7; 37:18-19; 40:12-26), so in 1 Corinthians 8:6 it is the prerogative of the Creator alone, from whom and through whom are all things, to be the true God.

In Galatians the apostle teaches that the law was implemented 'through angels by the hand of a mediator', but he is quick to clarify that 'the mediator is not one but God is one' (3:20). There is a concern on the part of Paul not to ascribe the divine nature – and in view of 4:8 we may indeed speak of such here – even to those serving a noble purpose

in the plan of God. In a doxological moment in 1 Timothy God is again said to be 'the

only God' (1:17). God wills that all should come to the saving knowledge of him

because there is just 'one God and one mediator of God, the man Jesus Christ (2:5). In

the epistle of James, bare monotheism is insufficient for truly pleasing God, but it is

(somewhat acerbically) commended in 2:19: 'You believe that God is one. You do well;

even the demons believe, and shudder.' Finally, in the doxology of the epistle of Jude

also God is exalted as 'the only God, our Savior' (1:25).

ii.   *Ad Simplicitatem*

Having examined biblical teaching on the singularity of God under different

dimensions – the universality of God's sovereignty, the distinction between the God of

Israel and the other gods, and the absolute and direct descriptions of God as the only God

– we may characterize God's singularity as the uniqueness, particularity, and

incommunicability with which he is God, which is inclusive of the Trinity of persons but

exclusive of false gods unworthy of the designation and exclusive of all created being.

This is a deference to the unassuming biblical attestation of Yahweh alone as the one true

God, Creator, Lord, and Savior rather than a capitulation to Enlightenment or post-

Enlightenment categories or a distortion of the prophetic and apostolic message. En route

to considering how the divine uniqueness and exclusivity with which God is God implies

that he is simple, it is fitting to clarify the meaning of the term 'one' in dogmatic

description.

Returning momentarily to the analytical resources of classical metaphysics, *quantitas* is an accident and may be defined as that 'by which something is denominated how much [*quantum*].' It is then ramified into *quantitas continua*, which is called *magnitudo*, and *quantitas discreta*, which is called *multitudo* and *numerus*.[311] *Quantitas* is proper to corporeal things and predicated of something 'by reason of matter'. For Maccovius, *quantitas discreta* may be taken either as 'number properly applied to its own domestic subjects' or as 'number analogically attributed to external subjects in which quantity does not fall'. In the latter use it can be predicated of spiritual beings.[312] Moving beyond *accidens* and *quantitas* altogether, and providing greater clarity, Alsted distinguishes between *numerus praedicamentalis* (*quantitas*) and *numerus transcendentalis*, which is predicable of spiritual beings. In this schema, *unitas* may be taken as *numerus praedicamentalis* or *quantitativus* and so as *principium numeri*. Alternatively, it can be taken as *numerus transcendentalis* and so as a 'mode of being [*modus entis*], according to which everything can be numbered'. Again, *numerus* can be taken either as *respectivus*, 'according to which a being [*ens*] is numbered with another', or as *absolutus*, 'according to which a being is numbered without collation' (*hic* τὸ *unus non respicit secundum*).[313]

If we weave the threads together in offering a responsible statement about God's singularity, we may say that God is without quantity and yet at the same time suitably called *unus* and *singularis* as long as his unity is acknowledged as transcendental and

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[311] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 3, p. 236.
[312] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 2, pp. 206, 211, 213.
[313] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 10, pp. 111-12.

absolute, never anticipating an enumeration of deity or deities. Hence Thomas writes on

the transcendental character of God's unity,

> one according to which it is the principle of number is not predicated of God, but
> only of these which have existence in matter. For the one that is the principle of
> number is about the genus of mathematical things, which has existence in
> matter….Truly, the one that is exchanged with being [*convertitur cum ente*] is
> something metaphysical, which according to existence does not depend on
> matter.[314]

Aptly summing up the line of reasoning here, Edward Leigh draws out the absoluteness

of God's unity and grounds it in scriptural testimony: 'because there are no more Gods

but one, God is not only One, but he is also the *only One*. He is such a one as hath no

Copartners in worship. Both which Titles are expresly ascribed unto God in the

Scriptures: Both that *he is One*, and that he is *the only One*.'[315] Thus, God is one and

singular in a manner that does not arithmetize him but rather befits his immateriality and

transcendence of the creaturely order and convenes with his uniqueness.

Turning to the implications for divine simplicity, there are at least four ways in

which the singularity and radical uniqueness of God entail that he is simple. First, God's

singularity entails the identity of nature and suppositum in God, which means that God is

ipsa deitas subsistens. This is to say that God is not an individuated version of a

universal nature. Yet, nor is he therefore a universal nature (or 'abstract object') itself,

for he is his own deity as eternally particular, personal, and actual. From the side of the

predicate (*ipsa deitas subsistens*), this means that, primordially, *deitas* has never been

present in the abstract or extended beyond God awaiting individuation but rather has

always been particular, personal, and actual in and as God. Negatively, in God's

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[314] Aquinas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 11, art. 3, ad 2, p. 112. Cf. Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 8, 5, p. 113.

[315] Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* (London, 1654), book 2, chap. 6, p. 158.

uniqueness and incommunicability, God is not composed of nature and suppositum. There is no species of divinity to be individuated: *idem est Deus, et hic Deus*.[316]

Still within the discussion of the nature-suppositum identity, the divine singularity entails also that each of the divine persons is the one God, which circumvents the possibility of the Father, Son, and Spirit being *individua* within a species of *deitas*. The identity of the three with *Deus unus* is so by virtue of the infinity of the essence: 'where there are three diverse persons, there is one thing and another, if actually the persons are such which have a finite nature. But these persons of the divine essence have an infinite nature or essence.'[317] Thus, not only God taken without reference to one of the divine persons but also each of persons is himself *ipsa deitas subsistens*. Accordingly, there is a twofold identity of nature and suppositum. First, *Deus unus* as *prima substantia* is his own deity subsisting. Second, each divine person is *ipsa deitas subsistens* in and as his own peculiar *modus subsistendi*. On the one hand, the persons are not individuals of a species but are each the one God, rendering 'suppositum' in a certain respect – and this must not be taken to elide the propriety of speaking of three *supposita* or *personae* – referable to God in the singular.[318] This consideration is also the *ratio* for the more precise descriptor of the persons as *tropoi hyparxeōs* or *modi subsistendi* of the one God

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[316] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 11, art. 3, p. 111. That there might still be an objective distinction between the *essentia* as *principium rei* and God as the only corresponding *essentia essentiata* for whom this *essentia* is *principium* is rejected below in the consideration of God's aseity.

[317] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 10, p. 88. Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 3, cap. 7, p. 221; Owen, *Brief Declaration and Vinidication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 388; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, p. 237; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 3, 9, p. 200. The divine essence is equally communicable to the Father, Son, and Spirit, and the aforementioned denial of the communicability of the Godhead applies only to creaturely reality.

[318] For more on this, see section C.iii in chapter five.

or the one divine essence. On the other hand, each of the persons is not a trait inhering in one of the others but subsists *per se* and incommunicably, rendering *subsistentia* or 'suppositum' in a certain respect referable to the Trinity of persons.[319] In sum, then, God's singularity implying the identity of nature and suppositum in God pertains (in different ways) to both *Deus unus* and *Deus trinus*.

Second, God's singularity entails that he transcends the categories of genus and species and so is not composed of genus and species. Genus is essence conceived generally and without differentiation into various species while species is essence taken specifically and completely. But the uniqueness of the biblical God implies that the divine essence cannot be restricted in or shared by different kinds of beings. Nor can it be, as though a species, a restriction of a more general grade of essence.[320] Barth's comments here are incisive:

> Whenever God is placed side by side with another factor (with the explicit or implicit copula 'and' or in some other way), we must clearly realise that there can be no question of a synthesis; that any conceivable synthesis is precluded in advance by the inclusion of the element God along with the others; that the element God stands in such a relation to all other elements that the latter, in spite of individual variations, are all characterised as one group; that by their intrinsic difference they are all separated from the divine in such a way that no higher unity is possible between them and God which can be expressed by a higher comprehensive term. If there is here a unity, it is not in any sense a unity which can be expressed by a higher term embracing God and these other elements. If we think and speak of God as an element juxtaposed with others in a series, the very idea or view of the series as such must be fundamentally disturbed (which in this case means reinterpreted) by the fact that the element God is in such a way independent of all the other elements and of the series as such, that, whatever may be the common denominator, God will not be embraced by it, but will remain

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[319] On this, see Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 23, 4-6, pp. 280-1; qu. 27, 14-15, p. 308.
[320] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 5, p. 210; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 12, p. 104.

detached and independent in regard both to these associated elements and to the common factor which binds them together. *Deus non est in genere*.[321]

Even in creating a universe that is reflective of his own perfection, God remains above the generic and specific registers. At a number of points in Scripture, God's singularity is seen as his being God in exclusive and incommunicable fashion. God's divinity is marked off from that of the purported gods of the Gentiles by the recognition that he alone is the Creator while the others have been created (Ps. 96:5; Isa. 17:7-8). Only the Creator of all is the true God, and this status by definition cannot be shared with another. To be sure, God does not have to create in order to be the true God, but, on supposition of the act and fact of creation, only the God who made all things is the true God. God's incommunicability appears in Galatians 3:20 as well as Paul speaks of an intermediary in the giving of the law but then quickly excludes such an intermediary from God's being. At the same time, we read in Psalm 82, for example, that God addresses human rulers as 'gods' and in 2 Peter 1:3-15 that God's power and promises enable us to become 'partakers of the divine nature', and such texts might seem to challenge the incommunicability of God and his nature and thus God's transcendence of genus and species.[322]

However, in this connection, Turretin helpfully distinguishes between two kinds of communication:

> one essential and formal by the intrinsic being [*esse*] of a thing, another of similitude and analogical in respect of effects and works. With respect to the prior, we say all the properties of God to be equally incommunicable…but we

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[321] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 310.

[322] In other words, God might be thought to share himself or his divinity with others such that this would then produce a general (or even just specific) category in which he or his divinity would come to embrace both himself and other individuating terms too, prompting the question of whether he is composed of genus and species.

confess the posterior to be able to be given, since God in creatures, chiefly rational ones, produces effects analogous to his own properties, as goodness, justice, wisdom, etc.[323]

Some attributes (immensity, eternity, and others) are strictly incommunicable, and in these there is 'nothing similar or analogous, or no image and vestige in creatures'. Others are communicable, not essentially or formally, but 'analogically, the similitude of which, or some obscures vestiges, are perceived in creatures'. Believers thus are made 'partakers of the divine nature' 'not by formal participation of the divine essence, but merely analogically by the benefit of regeneration'.[324] Thomas explicates the analogy by way of the causal relation between the Creator and the creature: 'whatever of perfection is in an effect, it is proper to be found in the effective cause….For it is manifest that an effect preexists in the power in the cause acting. But to preexist in the power of the cause acting is not to preexist in a more imperfect mode but in a more perfect [mode].'[325]

Creaturely perfections pre-exist in God *in virtute* and *simpliciter*:

> every effect not equaling the power of the cause acting receives a similitude of being not according to the same reason, but deficiently, so that what is in the effect dividedly and multiply is in the cause simply and in the same way….[A]ll the perfections of creatures, which are in created things dividedly and multiply, preexist in God unitedly.[326]

God or God's nature is thus essentially incommunicable and yet his simple perfection is analogously and diversely participated by creatures by God's causing them to be from and through and to himself (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6).

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[323] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Electicae*, III, qu. 6, 2, p. 208.
[324] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Electicae*, III, qu. 6, 3-5, pp. 208-9.
[325] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 4, art. 2, p. 51.
[326] Thomas, *ST*,Ia, qu. 13, art. 5, p. 146.

The matter of analogy is controversial in the post-Barthian milieu, and it is beyond the parameters of the present work to explore this in detail.[327] But, because it bears on the question of genus-species composition, it is worth noting that the Christian Creator-creature analogy is not that of 'many to one' but of 'one to another'.[328] In other words, the analogy or correspondence is not between God and the creature as though both were referred to a third thing that might measure and comprehend both in a single order of being. Instead, there is just the one God who is *extra ordinem creaturarum* and then the creature who is not a necessary correlate of God but rather utterly dependent upon God and contingently referred to him so as (faintly) to image forth God's wisdom, goodness, and power.[329] In this way, even in his communicative action and asymmetrically analogical relationship to the creature, God transcends genus and species and so is not composed of these.

Third, God's singularity implies that God is really identical with each of his perfections. In the reverse, each of God's perfections is really identical with God himself viewed under a certain aspect. Negatively, God is not composed of substance and inhering accidents. In created substances, accidents (*qualitates* in particular here) are derived from or adventitiously adjoined to the *substantia* and its nature. In God, however, his perfections are never accidents – even *accidentia propria* – but are schemas of God himself or God's own nature.[330]

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[327] For a detailed account of Barth's disagreement with Erich Przywara on the *analogia entis*, see Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2010).
[328] Wippel, 'Metaphysics', p. 116.
[329] Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 10, p. 30.
[330] Because he fails to recognize the implications of this theological move, Barry Smith (*The Oneness and Simplicity of God* [Eugene: Pickwick, 2013], pp. 122-9) opines that

God's uniqueness and particularity imply that he does not eternally individuate *formae accidentales* or *proprietates* but rather is each of his perfections or properties subsisting, even if he can upon creation grant to his creatures derivative and finite versions of knowledge, goodness, and so on which are individuated in many and possessed by many.[331] In a sense this is a modulation of the affirmation that God is *ipsa divinitas subsistens* and of the concomitant denial of nature-suppositum composition in God. For the divine perfections pertain to the divine essence (even for analytic philosophers holding that the perfections cluster together to compose the essence), and, given God's singularity, the essence, and therefore the perfections as well, await no individuation in a particular deity or deities. The divine perfections may be said to render God what he is as God, and this can be said whether one is inclined to view the perfections as really identical with the essence or as 'parts' of the essence. But the

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both sides in debates about simplicity work on 'the assumption that God is a substance who has attributes, or to use more modern terminology, a concrete object, i.e., individual, that exemplifies properties, which are abstract objects'. Strangely, while Smith acknowledges that traditional theologians regard God as *ousia hyperousios* who does not strictly speaking *possess* attributes, he still chides them for presupposing that God is a 'concrete individual' 'exemplifying properties'. Drawing from John Locke and Immanuel Kant, Smith's own positive comments suggest a radical apophaticism in which God is not a 'possible object of human understanding' and is 'beyond all human conceptuality' so that human speech can make 'no affirmations about God in himself'. The attempted alignment of this approach with the apophatic impulse in the catholic tradition, and with the claim that God cannot be known in himself but only in his works, is unsuccessful. For there is a distinction to be observed between a *cognitio quidditatis* and a *cognitio quidditativa* (see Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars 1, cap. 9, p. 80). The former is a comprehensive knowledge of God and of the content of his essence, while the latter is an apprehensive knowledge of that which concerns and, in a limited and inadequate way, describes the essence. The former is not granted – and cannot be granted – to creatures, while the latter is granted to creatures precisely by means of God's works in history.

[331] On a Thomistic reading of universals, such qualities are not created as abstract objects and then allocated to various creatures; rather, they are concreated with creatures and then subsequently judged to be qualities shared by multiple creatures.

scriptural insistence on the God of Israel being the exclusive focal point of deity who shares this status with no other implies that we ought not to postulate accidental forms, properties, or perfections as eternal co-existents objectively distinct from God that would furnish his divinity. It is more prudent instead to recognize God himself alone as the sole locus of divinity and to hold that God is each of his perfections or attributes subsisting, while each of these is God under some aspect. To confess that God is each of his perfections subsisting is to say that God is love, for example, neither as an individuated version of a universal nor as an abstract universal itself but rather as eternally particular, personal, and actual in and as God. From the side of the predicate (love), it is to say that love has never been an 'abstract object' susceptive of subsequent individuation; rather, it has from eternity never exceeded God and always dwelt particularly, personally, and actually in and as God himself.

This calls into question the legitimacy of taking Platonic realism with its construals of properties and other ontological matters as a philosophical point of departure for evaluating historic claims in the Christian doctrine of God. In view of God's singularity, one must not assume Platonic realism and therewith prejudice the discussion of divine simplicity. Instead, one must acquiesce to the revelation of God's singularity in Holy Scripture and then permit this both, positively, to compel recognition of God as himself the fullness of each perfection and, negatively, to defuse the possibility of any alternative loci of perfection and ultimacy *praeter Deum*.

Fourth, and finally, God's singularity implies broadly that all that is in God is really identical with God himself (*quod habet, quod est*) and that there is therefore no composition whatsoever in God. In a sense this statement is merely a logical

enlargement of the claim regarding the real identity of God with each of his perfections: in his singularity, God himself alone is that which renders God who and what he is, and he does not glean or assemble what he is from other things which would be, if he were a composite, multiple underlying loci of divinity. As Anselm judges, 'every composite that subsists owes that it is to these from which it is. For whatever is, by those it is, and those that are, are not by it.'[332] Even if the *quod habet* were thought to be, not an iteration of universals external to God, but just a conglomerate internal (though not really identical) to God himself, such would still in some sense be a nucleus of divinity other than God himself. It is thus a matter of theological caution (rather than speculation) to countenance the axiom *quod habet, quod est*. As Leigh writes, 'For that is most truly and properly one, which is nothing but itself, and hath no other thing mixed with it.'[333] In this way, God's simplicity reinforces that, as Barth puts it, 'in all that [God] is and does, He is wholly and undividedly Himself.'[334]

iii.   Conclusion

In this section we began by examining biblical teaching on the universality of God's sovereignty, the difference between the God of Israel and the other gods, and the absolute (*quoad se*) oneness of God. All of this requires the theological judgment that God is singular in the uniqueness, particularity, and strict incommunicability with which he is God. As one – *unus* taken as *numerus transcendentalis* and *absolutus* – God is

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[332] Anselm, *Monologion*, cap. 17, p. 31.
[333] Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 6, p. 158.
[334] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 445.

simple. He is his own divinity subsisting and transcends the categories of genus and

species. He is each of his own perfections subsisting, and all that belongs in him is really

identical to him. In this section, then, four of the claims in the sketch of simplicity

offered in chapter two have received exegetical and dogmatic substantiation, and they

will do so again from different angles in subsequent sections. If we recall the concerns

about simplicity that feature in the works of recent theologians and analytic philosophers,

it is worth noting that in this section the exegetical material, rather than an obtuse set of

philosophical assumptions, has impelled the movement toward divine simplicity even as

certain philosophical terms have been invoked for elaborative purposes. Further, the

agreement of the doctrine of divine simplicity with a traditional doctrine of the Trinity

has been adumbrated. Naturally, whether this understanding of the Trinity ought to be

perpetuated is a question that must be taken up later. The task immediately to hand now

is to continue the treatment of the divine attributes and their implicit commendation of

divine simplicity.

B.   'Life in himself': Divine Aseity and Divine Simplicity

The next divine attribute arising from exegetical study and implying God's

simplicity is his *aseitas*, which signifies principally that he is not *ab alio* but rather *a se*,

and in view of the biblical account of God this divine independence can be filled out

positively in terms of the freedom of God and the abundance of his life.[335] Accordingly,

strands of scriptural teaching impressing upon us God's freedom and plenitude govern

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[335] John Webster (e.g., 'Life in and of Himself', in *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, pp.
107-24) has duly emphasized that aseity is an attribute that bears positive content.

the conception of God's aseity unfolded in dogmatic elaboration here and operative in inferring God's simplicity. While each of the attributes treated in this chapter and the next makes a contribution to the theological rationale for the doctrine of divine simplicity, the aseity of God lies at the center, and its significance will be made clear below.

i.   Biblical Teaching

The first thread of biblical teaching here concerns the freedom of God. A number of textual loci might be considered in connection with divine freedom, but a few selections from the Old and New Testaments must suffice in cultivating an exegetically informed understanding of it. The giving of the divine name in Exodus 3 is a multi-dimensional event and, among other things, displays God's freedom. As God meets Moses in the burning bush and Moses voices his hesitation about going before Pharaoh, God provides reassurance: 'I will be with you' (Exod. 3:12). Yet Moses remains unconvinced and insists that he must have a means of identifying God, for the people are likely to ask his name (3:13).[336] As Gerhard von Rad writes, 'The subject is in the name, and on that account the name carries with it a statement about the nature of its subject or

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[336] This is a pressing question, not because the name יְהוָה had never been heard or used before (Gen. 4:26; 9:26; 12:8; 26:25; 28:16; 30:27), or because a mere term is needed to reference God, but because the content and significance of the name have not yet been revealed and understood (cf. Exod. 6:3), and because the saving power of the God who bears the name is not obvious under the bondage in Egypt.

at least about the power appertaining to it.'[337] God proceeds with an enigmatic answer:

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה ('I am/will be who/what I am/will be'), and this appears to be an exposition

of יְהוָה, which is most properly called the divine name (3:15; 6:3; 33:19).[338] The giving of

the name has an element of concealment and deferral: 'The formula is paradoxically both

an answer and a refusal of an answer….God announces that his intentions will be

revealed in his future acts, which he now refuses to explain.'[339] Again: 'By revealing

himself as "I AM WHO I AM" the Lord…in effect [says], "Yes, I have committed myself to

you to be actively present with you, but I am not at your unfettered disposal. My active

presence is mine and mine alone to exercise as and when and under what conditions I

choose."'[340] This sovereign freedom is underscored in Exodus 33:19 when God links his

name, יְהוָה, to his liberty to bestow grace and compassion on whom he wills.[341] Yet this

freedom is not capricious.[342] For God has already promised to be with Moses in 3:12.

Further, the name of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is bound up with the name יְהוָה, which points up that

God is the God of the patriarchs who promises to deliver Israel from the land of Egypt

(3:15). Thus, God is free to act in a manner of his own choosing and will not be coerced

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[337] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume I: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 181-2.

[338] So, e.g., R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 21-2.

[339] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 76.

[340] J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove and Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 70.

[341] Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), p. 436; Childs, *Book of Exodus*, p. 596.

[342] On the blend of divine freedom and divine constancy here, compare Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), p. 30.

by human predilection, and yet, having already vouchsafed his covenant promises to Israel, he will not turn from them.

The announcement of God's freedom in Exodus 33:19 is echoed by Paul in Romans 9. Israel has rejected her Messiah, but, the apostle remarks, God has not wavered in his faithfulness to Israel. For not all physical descendents of Abraham or ethnic Israel are of the true Israel, and God has indeed brought salvation to the true Israel and therefore remained faithful to his promises (Rom. 9:1-7a). That not all physical descendents are to receive the promise is demonstrated in that the Abrahamic covenant continues through Isaac rather than Ishmael, and through Jacob rather than Esau. In fact, the election of Jacob instead of Esau occurred before the two were born or had done anything good or evil in life (9:7b-13). But, an interlocutor might ask, is this not injustice on the part of God? No, Paul responds, for God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and compassion on whom he will have compassion. When he grants mercy it is because of his own initiative and not because of human exertion or merit, and when he so chooses, he can harden the hearts of human beings (9:14-18). But, an interlocutor might reply, no one can resist the will of God, so how is it that, when God hardens the heart, God can still find such a one to be culpable? Surprisingly, Paul does not temper his remarks about God's freedom in election and reprobation or insinuate that God is, after all, just a responsive onlooker conditioned by human designs: 'O man, but who are you answering back to God? Will the thing molded say to the one molding, "Why did you make me thus?" Or does the potter not have authority over the clay to make from the same batch what, on the one hand, is a vessel for honor and what, on the other hand, is a

vessel for dishonor?'[343] God has borne with some prepared for destruction in order to

show his mercy to those prepared for glory, both Jews and Gentiles (9:19-24).

It may be appealing to posit that election and hardening in this passage concern

only the Jewish people as a whole and in their instrumental role in redemptive history,[344]

but it should be kept in mind that Paul originally sets out to explain why many individual

ethnic Jews have not embraced the coming of the Messiah while others have done so, and

he is apparently concerned with their eternal salvation (9:1-3, 8). The Old Testament

material on Jacob, Esau, and Pharaoh, then, is commandeered in Romans 9 to illumine

why some Jews are cut off from Christ and his benefits.[345] Yet, in what follows, it is

apparent also that Israel is found to be at fault on account of her own unbelief and

disobedience (9:30-10:21). With Turretin, then, it should be acknowledged that *objectum*

praedestinationis is *hominem consideratum ut lapsum*, and it is fitting to distinguish

between reprobation taken *absolute*, on the one hand, and *comparate*, on the other: 'if it

is considered absolutely, it is rightly ascribed to the native corruption of man, which

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[343] James D. G. Dunn (*Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco: Word, 1988], pp. 555-6) observes that Paul does not retort that the interlocutor has misunderstood the line of reasoning. Instead of shrinking back from the notion that the distinction between the elect and reprobate of Israel stems from God's unconditioned will, Paul rebukes the interlocutor for presuming that God is answerable to human beings. 'Calling the Creator to account for the way he has created his world, or the way he has disposed over its history, lies outside the competence of a creature' (Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985], p. 161).

[344] As in, for example, Ben Witherington, III, Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 253, 255, 256-7.

[345] Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 571-2. A number of commentators (for example, Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 562) warn that one cannot extrapolate from this passage the inner logic of election in general. Whatever the bearing of Romans 9 on the doctrine of election in systematic theology, the point stands that, with respect to at least one demographic of the elect and reprobate, namely, ethnic Jews, God is free in this text to act according to his good pleasure.

makes him justly reprobable; if truly comparatively, it is to be referred to only the good pleasure of God, electing whom he wills and passing over the rest according to his own most free authority.'[346] God reprobates only (but not all) *sinful* human beings, and for him to do otherwise would be unjust, but, given human sin and guilt, he acts according to his own mysterious freedom in the decision of whom to elect and whom to reprobate.[347] Peter Vermigli's summative comments on Romans 9 are fitting: 'There are, then, two things which it is proper constantly to retain: first, there not to be any iniquity in the presence of God; the other, him to show mercy to whomever he has willed, and to harden whomever he has willed according to his own freedom.'[348] Like Exodus 3, then, Romans 9 represents God as both entirely righteous and faithful to his covenant promises and also free from coercion from external circumstances and free to act according to his own good pleasure.

God's freedom concerns not only the particular manner of his acting in redemptive history or the work of predestination but also his decision to bring creation into being. In Psalm 50, God chooses not to accept the sacrifices of his people on account of their rebelliousness, and God states that he possesses all of creation and that, if he were hungry, he would simply take from what is already his (50:8-12). Of course, God adds that he does not actually consume food and drink (50:13), and the point is that he does not have anything to gain from his creatures even as he commands Israel to bring offerings before him. Similarly, in Acts 17 Paul emphasizes that God is the Maker and

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[346] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, IV, qu. 14, 11 and 13, pp. 421-2.
[347] A discussion of supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism (and of how some have sought to integrate them) is beyond the bounds of this study, but I hold to the infralapsarian view.
[348] Peter Vermigli, *In Epistolam S. Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos* (Heidelberg, 1613), p. 347.

Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in temples built by human hands, and he is not cared for by human hands as though having need of anything. Rather, he is the one who does the giving and the serving by supplying life and breath to all others (Acts 17:24-28). In short, God has no need to receive anything *ab alio* but is wholly self-sufficient.

Second, Holy Scripture tells of the fullness and plenitude of God's life, and here we return to the name of God in Exodus 3 in order to ponder more closely the statement אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה in its intimation of the immanent profusion of God. Though some have posited that the verb was originally in the *hiphil* stem and had a causative *Aktionsart* ('I cause to be what I cause to be'),[349] there is no textual evidence for the *hiphil* stem. Accordingly, it is more prudent to accept the *qal* stem of the Masoretic text and thus the translation 'I am what I am' or 'I will be what I will be.'[350] The verb is in the imperfect conjugation, and its tense, which in Hebrew is not presented morphologically but garnered contextually, is often taken to be future, not least because the present tense, some wager, would not be delivered by means of the imperfect of *hayah* but by means of a nominal clause.[351] Yet a case can be made for not excluding the present tense. When

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[349] So P. Haupt, 'Der Name Jahwe', *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 12 (1909), pp. 211-14; W. F. Albright, 'Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43 (1924), pp. 370-80; William H. Brownlee, 'The Ineffable Name of God', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 226 (1977), p. 45.
[350] See Raymond Abba, 'The Divine Name Yahweh', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961), p. 325; J. Philip Hyatt, 'Was Yahweh Originally a Creator Deity?', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), pp. 374-5; Roland de Vaux, 'The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH', in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*, ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), pp. 62-4; Dennis J. McCarthy, 'Exod 3:14: History, Philology, and Theology', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978), p. 316.
[351] So William R. Arnold, 'The Divine Name in Exodus iii. 14', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 24 (1905), pp. 126-7; Abba, 'The Divine Name Yahweh', pp. 324-5; William

God identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in 3:6, the copulative verb is absent and only implicit, suggesting the present tense. God is thus concerned to clarify who he *is*. When God reassures Moses of his continual presence, his being with Moses probably concerns the present as well as the future, and the statement 'I am with you' or 'I will be with you' with the verb *hayah* appears to anticipate the giving of the name in 3:14.[352] Further, in later canonical reverberations of the name, the present tense is, sometimes via the nominal clause אֲנִי הוּא ('I am he'), placed in the foreground (Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; John 8:58; Rev. 1:8). Thus, in its contextual and canonical environs, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה indicates that God both is what he is and will be what he will be. This is not just a mystifying tautology but also a boon to the faith of Israel: 'wherever God is being God, God will be the kind of God God is. Israel need not be concerned about divine arbitrariness or capriciousness. God can be counted on to be who God is.'[353] The statement 'I am what I am' therefore signals the immanent determinacy with which God is God.

Taking up the language of being, earlier theologians also regard Exodus 3:14-15 as an indication that God is the one who absolutely and truly is.[354] Though it has largely set aside the myth that the ancient Hebrews lacked the ability to conceive of being *per*

H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999), pp. 204-5.

[352] Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), pp. 365-6.

[353] Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), p. 63. *Pace*, for example, Bertil Albrektson, 'On the Syntax of אהיה אשר אהיה in Exodus 3:14', in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas*, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 27n3.

[354] For example, Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, lib. 12, 24, pp. 447-8; Augustine, *De Trinitate*, lib. 5, cap. 2, 3, p. 912.

se,[355] recent Old Testament scholarship is still resistant to premodern treatments of the text, often labeling them 'philosophical'. Urging that Exodus 3:14 cannot contain a statement about God's absolute being or aseity, von Rad cautions, 'Such a thing would be altogether out of keeping with the Old Testament.'[356] In the same vein, de Vaux warns, 'One must take care not to introduce into it [the verb 'to be'] the metaphysical notion of Being in itself, of aseity as elaborated by Greek philosophy.'[357] Similarly, Christopher Seitz counsels against interpretations that become 'detached or obscured' and contends that 'we are not learning something about God's substance or essence but something about a personal identity and history he is about to make good on at Sea and Sinai.'[358]

Yet, if one holds to the theological coherence of Scripture and the attendant hermeneutical principle of the *analogia Scripturae*, the New Testament development of the divine name points in a somewhat different direction. In John's Gospel, the divine name is taken up by Jesus to establish his eternal existence and antecedence of Abraham (8:58).[359] A comparable filling out of the divine name occurs in the book of Revelation. Here we see the formulae ὁ ὤν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ('the one who is and who was and who is coming') (1:4, 8; 4:8) and ὁ ὤν καὶ ὁ ἦν ('the one who is and who was') (11:17; 16:5). Following Jewish reflection on the name, the Apocalypse thus interprets it to teach that God eternally is. Admittedly, in Revelation 1:4, 8 and 4:8 the third term is not the future indicative of εἰμί but rather the present participle ἐρχόμενος ('is coming'),

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[355] See, most famously, James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: SCM, 1983), pp. 58-72.

[356] von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 180.

[357] de Vaux, 'Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH', p. 70.

[358] Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 140.

[359] See, e.g., Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), pp. 769-71.

alluding to God's impending action in judgment and salvation.[360] Just so, Revelation's

rendition of the divine name demonstrates that we need not choose between theology and

history. God is the one who eternally is and is also the one at work in the world in its

temporality.[361] Polanus thus aptly holds the balance on the divine name, determining that

it communicates both 'God from himself and by himself always to have been, to be, and

to be in the future' and 'to be most true and constant in promises and warnings to be

kept'.[362]

Undoubtedly, it would be out of place to disconnect Exodus 3:14 from its

historical and covenantal moorings and use it as a mere springboard for philosophical

speculation. Yet Old Testament commentators too often overcompensate here, missing

certain layers of the divine name in Scripture, especially its apparent reference to God's

eternal and, we may infer, absolute and underived, existence.[363] Furthermore, the

reticence about reading the divine name in a so-called 'philosophical' manner on the part

of Old Testament scholars is often grounded in a concern to preserve what they call

God's 'active being', his 'dynamic being', or his 'efficacious being'.[364] However, what

is missed is that, for patristic and other earlier exegetes, taking the divine name to reveal

God's absolute existence is certainly not to claim that God is inert or aloof but rather to

perceive precisely that God is abundant and blessed in himself and, out of this, able to act

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[360] See the analysis of Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New
Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 28-30.
[361] Compare John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987),
p. 39.
[362] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 6, p. 139.
[363] 'Absolute' here has the sense of 'complete' and also conveys that God's existence is
not referred *ad aliud* or measured *ab alio*.
[364] Abba, 'Divine Name Yahweh', p. 327; Sigmund Mowinckel, 'The Name of the God
of Moses', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961), p. 127; von Rad, *Old Testament
Theology*, p. 180.

mightily in history. In sum, reading the divine name as a disclosure of God's absolute and eternal existence has canonical justification and, if rightly conceived, also honors the economic liveliness of God so jealously guarded by biblical scholars by discerning its ground in the *esse absolutum* of God's own immanent life.[365]

Much like the prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah deprecates the gods of other nations as vapid idols and in so doing brings the vitality of the God of Israel into sharp focus. The gods of other nations are the 'works of their hands' (1:16; 25:6; 30:32; 44:8), but Yahweh is the source of all blessing and provision and is the living God (2:13; 14:22; 23:36). These themes are laid out most poignantly in 10:1-16. Here the idols are derided as the products of craftsmen, hewn from a tree, adorned with gold and silver, and strengthened with hammer and nails (10:1-4). They are mute, immobile, unable to act for good or evil (10:5). They lack the breath of life and are but a false delusion (10:14-15). In contrast, Yahweh is the mighty sovereign over all the nations (10:6-7). Over against the falsehood and vanity of the idols, Yahweh is truth; over against the lifelessness of the idols, Yahweh is the living God; over against the forthcoming destruction of the idols, Yahweh is the everlasting King (10:10). In contrast to the impotency and vacuity of the idols, Yahweh governs the natural world and is the Maker of all things (10:11-16). In the words of modern commentators on Jeremiah 10, 'The Lord is, indeed, the only reality

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[365] Compare R. Michael Allen, 'Exodus 3 after the Hellenization Thesis', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009), pp. 179-96.

that is true, living, effective, and lasting.'[366] Again, '[A hymnic confession] finds in the person of Yahweh divine reality and quintessence of life and power.'[367]

In the New Testament, life persists as a distinguishing mark of the one true God (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:9), and this is most explicit in the Johannine literature. In John, Jesus teaches that the Father has 'life in himself' and gives to the Son to have 'life in himself' (John 5:26; cf. 6:57). Through the divine Word all things were made and in him was the life which produces human existence and orients it to God (1:3-4). Because he has life in himself, the Son is able to make the dead live (5:25). Jesus is 'the life' (ἡ ζωή) and the one on account of whom believers will never die (11:25-26; cf. 14:6).[368] In his first epistle, John and his companions proclaim Jesus as 'the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us' (1 John 1:2), the arrangement of the sentence suggesting that Jesus' being the eternal life with the Father is prior to and independent of his appearing to believers and providing eternal life for them. To have the Son is to have life (5:12), for Jesus is 'the true God and eternal life' (5:20).[369] For John, Christ as God has and is that life by which contingent reality comes to be and in which believers are made to participate.

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[366] Patrick D. Miller, 'The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections', in vol. 6 of *The New Interpreter's Bible: In Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), p. 661.

[367] Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 127.

[368] Here ἡ ἀνάστασις and ἡ ζωή have their own articles and their own explanations in verse 26, legitimizing consideration of ἡ ζωή as a distinct concept. So C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 365.

[369] For the view that the referent of οὗτος in 5:20b is Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ in 5:20a, see Brown, *Epistles of John*, pp. 625-6.

In the Johannine conception of God, the Holy Spirit too is closely tied to the notion of life. The Spirit is the one who gives the new birth (John 3:5-8; 6:63) and is the 'living water' that satisfies the people of God (7:37-39). At the climax of the book of Revelation, living water, likely a symbol of the Spirit, flows from the divine throne to rejuvenate the nations: 'Ezekiel 47 provides the primary background for Rev. 22:1-2, and it pictures the life-giving presence of God among his people in the renewed temple as an Edenlike river flowing from the renewed temple.'[370]

In addition to John's usage of *zōē* terminology, his teaching on God's spirituality also underlines the abundance of God's life. As Marianne Meye Thompson demonstrates, *pneuma* in Johannine theology can be employed to denote 'the very life-giving breath of God' as well as 'a distinct agent of God'.[371] In John 4:24 we learn that 'God is spirit.' In the Old Testament, the divine רוּחַ denotes God's vitality and power operative in creating and sustaining natural life (Gen. 1:2; 6:3; Job 27:3-4; 33:4; Ps. 33:6; 104:30) and in renewing the people of God (Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3; Ezek. 36:22-37:14).[372] It is this generative and regenerative power with which God is denominated in John 4:24 as Jesus teaches that true worshipers are those transformed in their spirits by God's renovating work and conformed in their minds to his self-revelation.

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[370] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 769.

[371] Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 185.

[372] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1967), pp. 47-65; Friedrich Baumgärtel, 'πνεῦμα, πνευματικός', in vol. 6 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 362-7.

Finally, God's luminosity also attests God's abundance and prolificacy. God in Christ is the light of the world, the one who brings truth, restoration, and blessedness to the earth. Whoever follows him will, in keeping with the prophecy about light and living water in Zechariah 14:6-9, have τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς, that light which yields spiritual plenty and blessing (taking τῆς ζωῆς as an objective genitive) or is a construal of these (taking τῆς ζωῆς as an epexegetical genitive) (John 8:12). The issuance of eschatological light is climactically depicted in the concluding chapters of Revelation. In fulfillment of Isaiah 60:19-20, the New Jerusalem has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God is its light and the Lamb of God its lamp, by which the nations walk and are blessed (21:23-25; 22:4-5). 'The light-giving sources of sun and moon were essential for life and prosperity in the old Jerusalem when God's presence was limited to the temple. But now in the new cosmos God's complete presence among his people is what…satisfies their every need.'[373]

ii.   *Ad Simplicitatem*

In view of the pertinent biblical teaching, we may characterize God's aseity in terms of his independence, for such texts as Psalm 50:12-13 and Acts 17:24-28 lay stress on God needing nothing *ab alio*. To this independence we may also add what Voetius calls God's *primitas*, which excludes *posterioritas*, for there is no one and nothing back of the God of Holy Scripture which might account for him.[374] It is possible to treat these

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[373] Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 1093-4.
[374] Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 13, p. 226.

as divine attributes in their own right, but, as already suggested, it is fitting to include under the register of God's aseity the life of God and the freedom of God as well.[375]

The notion of life both in general and in its application to God is difficult to define, but it is helpfully unpacked in terms of action and movement in Thomas and Reformed orthodox theologians. Thomas writes that *vivere* is to exist in a nature to which self-movement (*movere seipsum* or *agere se quocumque modo ad operationem*) belongs, and *vita* signifies *in abstracto* this existing in such a nature.[376] Life is properly attributed to God because *vivere* signals that things 'operate from themselves, and not as moved by others'.[377] Further, neither immanent action or motion nor transient action or motion on the part of the actor (though not on the part of the patient) necessarily imply *potentia passiva*, and in God's case his *vivere*, which includes his *intelligere*, *velle*, *amare*, and so on, is eternal and always actual.[378] Indeed, 'because he lives not by participation of life but by himself, it is shown [that God is] his own life and his own living [*vivere*]' (so John 1:4; 5:26; 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:20).[379] Catching up the biblical

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[375] God's freedom is well-suited to treatment under the divine will in a more methodical and comprehensive exposition of the loci in systematic theology.

[376] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 18, art. 2, pp. 226-7.

[377] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 18, art. 3, p. 227.

[378] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1, ad 1, p. 90; qu. 18, art. 3, ad 1, p. 228; Michael J. Dodds, 'St Thomas Aquinas and the Motion of the Motionless God', *New Blackfriars* (1987), pp. 238-40; Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 4, pp. 233, 236. In linking this to trinitarian considerations, Maccovius clarifies that the Son as the object and receiver of the Father's generative act is not moved from passive potency to actuality because (1) this is an eternal act and (2) the Father does not communicate the essence *absolute* but *in ratione modi*, and the question of potency and actuality pertains to the persons as God and essentially, not as *modi subsistendi* (*Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 4, p. 234).

[379] Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 5, qu. 2, p. 113. The aim in quoting Zanchi here to point up the identity of God with his own life and action or movement is only to reinforce that discussing God's life in terms of self-movement does not entail that God passes from potentiality to actuality. That is, this is not a smuggling in of one facet of the doctrine of

emphasis on God's life being manifest in his power and action (2 Kings 19:15-19; Isa. 41:21-29; 46:6-7; Jer. 10:1-16) and at the same time puncturing the amorphous sentiment that older authors in western Christianity have somehow conceived of God as 'static', Polanus thus renders the *vita divina*: 'the life of God is the essential property of God, or the divine essence itself living, by which God is signified actively to live and to do all things by himself and to be endowed with a force of acting and moving and accordingly to give life to others also.'[380]

Because this life is boundless and eternally blessed and enjoyed in the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Spirit with no lack or paucity (Ps. 16:11; 36:8-9; John 17:5; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 9:5; 11:35-36; 2 Cor. 11:31; 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:15), we may ascribe to God a perfection that is his 'entirely spontaneous plenitude and completeness…as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'.[381] Formally stated, 'the perfection of God is the essential property of God by which it is understood [that] simply nothing [lacks] to the divine essence.' This nothing lacking is attributed to God not merely *privative* (to him nothing lacks that is requisite to the integrity of his nature) but also *negative* and *simpliciter* (to him absolutely nothing of perfection is lacking).[382] Put differently, 'the perfection of God is not

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divine simplicity (God is his own life) in order, in circular fashion, to infer later that God is simple.

[380] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 15, p. 154. As Webster writes, God's perfection is not 'mere immobility, rest conceived as simple absence of motion. To say God "is" *a se* is to say God "live[s]" *a se*. God is, and therefore God lives, and therefore God moves' ('God's Perfect Life', in Miroslav Wolf and Michael Welker, eds., *God's Life in Trinity* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006], p. 147).

[381] John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 1-2.

[382] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 9, p. 143.

limited…in a certain genus…but universal, which encloses every good, in every genus, and suffices in all things for all things as far as to infinite beatitude.'[383]

This plenitude in its bearing on whether God should will to bring creatures into being or not is transposed as God's freedom. The freedom of God signifies here not only a *libertas spontaneitatis* whereby God can choose whether to created the world without coaction or external compulsion but also a *libertas indifferentiae* whereby God can will to create the world or will not to create the world. This *libertas indifferentiae* is not a coldness toward creation but rather only a genuine freedom to choose to create or not to do so without occurrence of any self-enhancement or diminution: 'God wills all created things on account of himself, not to be perfected, as if he should have need of these, but to be communicated, and his own goodness and glory to be manifested in those. Thence, because he can lack all those without any detriment to his own beatitude, he is said freely to will these.'[384] Yet, according to Exodus 3 and Romans 9 God is not free to violate his own righteousness and goodness and, upon willing and promising to undertake a course of action *pro nobis*, is not free to renege on this determination. In this way, the biblical text precludes a nominalist doctrine of God's absolute freedom and also implies the distinction between absolute and hypothetical necessity. In view of God's independence and plenitude, God does not will creation and the events therein with an absolute necessity, but he does will these with a hypothetical or suppositional necessity: with the decision in favor of a course of action in place, God, on pain of breaching his own integrity and faithfulness, cannot subsequently deviate from that decision.

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[383] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 11, 6, p. 221.
[384] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 14, 3-8, pp. 241-2.

154

In this dogmatic description of God's aseity, it should be clear that it includes

both positive content and negative content, each side requiring careful expression.[385]

Positively, God's aseity is the divine repletion in which God himself is that in virtue of

which God enjoys fullness of deity, life, and beatitude. Accordingly, the positive content

here is not to be taken to mean literalistically that God causes himself to exist.[386] It

means instead that God himself is the 'sufficient condition' and 'explanation' for his own

essence and existence.[387] Negatively, divine aseity encapsulates that God does not

receive anything from another. The divine perfections such as aseity, omnipresence,

goodness, and so on are predicated of the persons as God or *ad se* and absolutely, not in

personal distinction or *ad alterum* and relatively, which entails that the aseity of God is

not mitigated by trinitarian teaching. To query whether *modi subsistendi* as such are

omnipresent, good, and so on is a category mistake.[388] Therefore, whether one is

speaking of God taken absolutely or God taken relatively (as to one of the persons of the

Trinity), God is wholly *a se*, which implies that he is simple in at least five ways.

Divine aseity entails first that God is *actus purus*. If God is entirely *a se* with no

one and nothing back of him to account for him, then he is without causal susceptibility –

without *moveri* or, indeed, *posse moveri* – and therefore without the root of such causal

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[385] So Mastricht: 'the negative attributes of God, in their own material concept, [involve], beyond negation of imperfection, affirmation of highest perfection' (*Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 3, 24 [mistakenly numbered as 25], p. 83).

[386] For a withering critique of such a misreading of divine aseity, see Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 3, 22, pp. 82-3.

[387] Dolezal, *God without Parts*, p. 71.

[388] Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, in *Operum Omnium Quae Extant, Tomus Secundus* (Geneva, 1614), lib. 1, cap. 4, pp. 86-7, 92; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 3, cap. 2, p. 200. Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, p. 121; Owen, *Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, pp. 409-10.

susceptibility, namely, passive potency (*nihil patitur nisi ratione potentiae passivae*).[389]

Aseitas inflected as *independentia* or *primitas* thus implies that God is fully in act.[390] If

aseity is inclusive of God's perfection as well, then there is another important link

between aseity and the absence of act-potency composition in God. For in his eternal

plenitude and repletion God lacks in nothing and in this way is *actus purus*. For, if his

being contained passive potency, this would – insofar as God could assume or receive

only that which is good (cf. Jas. 1:17; 1 John 1:5) – entail that he could undergo an

enhancement of himself: 'Metaphysical passive potency is in every being that is not its

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[389] Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, in vol. 8 of *Opera Omnia* (Parma, 1856), qu. 1, art. 1, corp., p. 2.

[390] By starting from the other pole with creaturely *moveri*, Thomas ascends to God as the *primus motor* and reaches the same conclusion: 'it is necessary for that which is the first being to be in act, and in no way in potency. For, although in one and the same thing that departs from potency into act, potency is prior to act in time, nevertheless, simply, act is prior to potency. For what is in potency is not reduced into act except by a being in act' (*ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 1, corp., p. 35). Because passive potency is always actualized by one already in act, and because this cannot carry on *ad infinitum* (lest there be no one who primally initiates motion and no explanation for the motion in the world), the first mover or Creator is *actus purus*. For a close analysis of Thomas' claims, see Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of His Philosophical Theology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 104-14. Weigel notes that, in Thomas' thought, if potency in the first cause should be actualized by another, 'in that case the first would not be a true first cause; the prior agent would be' (p. 112). Indeed, as the first, 'self-explanatory' cause, God already 'prepossesses' *eminenter* all actuality and perfection granted to creatures so that creatures cannot 'reciprocally [give] back the actuality' (pp. 130-5). Yet, Weigel comments, it might be that 'a first cause could initiate actualization in itself, particularly since it initiates the existence and motion of all else' (p. 113). In my judgment, beginning with the absolute power (and so absolute actuality) required for the act of *creatio ex nihilo* sheds light on the fact that God could not have residual potency that he might himself actualize. Or, we may begin with the absolute fullness and completeness of God to ground the purity of his actuality (so Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 13, p. 228). Alsted corroborates that, as the first cause, God is not moved *ab alio*: 'the first cause cannot be ordered by anything but itself orders all things.' Put differently, 'determination and limitation cannot originate from a determined and limited thing' (*Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 16, p. 143).

own perfection but is fit to be perfected by something.'[391] But a biblical configuration of

God's aseity and perfection as God's fullness of life in himself and his not suffering any

deficiency or paucity obviates such passive potency and enhancement and therefore

implies that God is *actus purus*. It must be emphasized that it is not an *a priori* and

generic perfect being theology that legislates the conceptualization of divine perfection

here but rather the witness of Holy Scripture, from Jeremiah's contrasting of God and the

idols to John's accentuation of God's abundance, that requires us to ascribe to God a

copiousness of goodness, love, power, and so on that cannot at all be enlarged or

intensified and requires us then to say then that he is *actus purus*. Thus, rather than

suggesting that God is inert or languid, *actus purus* indicates that God is absolutely alive

and, on supposition of God's decision to create, is utterly poised to bless, judge, and save

his creatures. In addition, in light of the uniqueness of God's *actus*, it is permissible to

affirm with Barth that God is *actus purus et singularis*.[392]

A number of theologians maintain that *potentia passiva* is not repugnant to God's

perfection, provided that it is qualified to exclude the possibility of God being affected or

altered in matters of real moment,[393] but this claim encounters two problems. First, to the

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[391] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, p. 132.

[392] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 263-4. However, whether he is ultimately correct in his reading of Barth or not, McCormack's recent claim ('Actuality of God', pp. 213-16) that in God's *actus* God determines himself in determining to be for us in the economy is, at the constructive level, discordant with the meaning and significance of *actus purus* in the tradition and in this study. Instead of suggesting that God is what he is only in willing to create and elect, the concept of *actus purus* in fact gives weight to the claim that God remains the same whether he chooses to create or not to create, for he is either way already complete and fully blessed in himself.

[393] See Marcel Sarot, *God, Possibility, and Corporeality*, Studies in Philosophical Theology (Kampen: Kok, 1992), p. 56; William Hasker, 'A Philosophical Perspective', in Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional*

extent that a purportedly innocuous *potentia passiva* in God would principally concern a

capacity to act afresh in relation to the changing circumstances of creatures, this still

would entail an actualization of God contrary to his aseity. For God's plenitude and

perfection obviate any need for him to acquire or manufacture a new *operatio*, a new

action or motion whereby he might accomplish his will in creation, or to rouse or elevate

himself to a new level of actuality.[394] Accordingly, God does not act *per aliquod*

superadditum ad suam naturam (a supplementary *actio* necessitated *ab extrinseco*) but

rather *per essentiam*.[395] As Alsted writes, 'in created beings essence is limited, and then

it is necessarily really distinguished from operation. But in uncreated being essence is

unlimited and so perfect, that it contains in itself all its own effects, without any

composition of itself.'[396]

Jenson urges that persons as such 'react to external events', and that literal

repentance and reaction on God's part are 'ontological perfections, not deficiencies'.[397]

However, this is to subsume God under a generic category of personhood enfolding and

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Understanding of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), pp. 131-3.

[394] So Keckermann: 'action is the perfection of potency. Therefore, God, who is perfection itself and mere act, properly has no potency toward act.' Nevertheless a certain *potentia activa* is attributed to God in respect of objects *extra Deum* not experiencing the divine *actio* and then subsequently experiencing it at a later time (*Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 5, p. 103).

[395] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 1, 15, p. 344.

[396] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 16, p. 148. The essence 'contains' the effects *virtualiter* and *eminenter* so as to preclude a composition by them. This line of thinking stipulates that not only the immanent acts of God but also the transient, extrinsic acts of God as to the *operatio* itself (though not as to the *opera* or things wrought) are just God himself or God's essence bearing on created objects. So Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 1, 15, p. 344; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 5, 6, p. 313.

[397] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, p. 222. Here Jenson asserts that anthropopathic readings of divine repentance imply that 'we do not know the biblical God.'

presiding over God and the creature alike. In view of God's aseity and completeness in Scripture, it is better to say that he does not need to be actuated in order to become more 'dynamic' or to relate in a more lively and fitting manner with the creature. Rather, he is already in the absoluteness of his life utterly dynamic and by his own essence personally and wisely active in the economy. From all of this, a second consideration emerges: with the removal of an objective distinction between God's *essentia* and *operatio* as two different *actus*, a novelty in the *operatio* suggests a novelty in the essence. The *operatio* just is the essence taken as acting relatively toward some creaturely object, which then poses another problem for the claim that God might possess a *potentia passiva* in a more or less inconsequential way.

Second, with God's singularity, God's aseity implies that he is his own divinity subsisting and is therefore not composed of nature and suppositum. In his independence and primacy, God himself is the fullness of deity and does not exemplify an abstract essence or abide under an objectively distinct *principium entis* that constitutes what he is. In different ways, both an analytico-Platonic (Wolterstorff's 'relation' ontology) and an Aristotelian philosophical apparatus conceive (created) things to be what they are by derivation, but the biblical text impresses upon us God's self-referential completeness, sufficiency, and ultimacy, which implies that he is what he is *per se* and as *ipsa deitas subsistens*, rather than *per participationem*. Once more, then, it is a matter of theological prudence (rather than speculation) to identify God with his own Godhead and to deny nature-suppositum composition in him. As in the case of God's singularity and its implications for divine simplicity, this identification is not to equate God with an abstract principle but rather to ensure that such a would-be abstract principle is reconceived

according to God's self-revelation so that it is not something behind or beyond God but instead already eternally particular as God himself.

Third, God's aseity implies that God or God's essence is *ipsum esse subsistens* and is therefore not objectively distinct from his own existence as *ens* from *principium entis* so as to be composed of essence and existence. That is, as the utterly independent, ultimate, and perfect one, God is absolute, underived *esse*, *ens per essentiam* rather than *ens per participationem*, which would entail dependence in contradiction of God's aseity.[398] This identification of essence and existence in God is a recognition of God's standing outside the generic lattice of *esse commune* participated by creatures and calls attention to his self-sufficiency in being and giving being to others.[399] Thomas' line of reasoning is apt here. Whatever is other than the essence of a given thing is derived 'either from the principles of the essence, as proper accidents following species…or from something exterior'.[400] Therefore, if God's existence were objectively distinct from his essence, it would be caused either by God's essence or by an external principle or agent. But it cannot be caused by God's essence, for this would entail that God would cause

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[398] So Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4, corp., p. 42; Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 2, pp. 85-6; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 142. Like *essentia*, *esse* is not, strictly speaking, a 'thing' but rather an internal principle of a thing. Nevertheless, the point stands that God depending on such a principle to be is inimical to his aseity.

[399] *Pace* Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, p. 59 and Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 220-2, the issue at stake is not merely whether God is a necessary being that exists in 'all possible worlds' but whether he is the one who absolutely *is* and whether he himself is the abundant source from which all other things come (Exod. 3:14; John 1:3-4; 8:58; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Rev. 1:8). Further, the bare assertion of God being *ens necessarium* is inadequate, for he would not be *ens necessarium* if here were not identical to his own existence. Cf. again Dolezal, *God without Parts*, pp. 143-4n50.

[400] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4, corp., p. 42.

himself to be.[401] Nor can it be caused by another, for, according to God's aseity in Holy

Scripture, God receives nothing from another, least of all his very existence. Therefore,

his *essentia* is identical to his *esse*, and he himself, then, is *ipsum esse subsistens*.[402]

Given that the essence-existence identification is driven by God's aseity and the

attendant Creator-creature distinction, the contemporary astonishment and resistance

surrounding the identification is arguably indicative of a failure to look beyond the

creaturely realm to the Creator-creature distinction and to ascertain the theological

consequences of the divine aseity. Such theological nearsightedness begets the concern

that naming God *ipsum esse subsistens* renders God an 'abstract object'. But this naming

is not to equate God with an abstract object but rather to acquiesce to the constraints of

God's independence and plenitude and to rein in such a would-be abstract as *esse* and

recast it so that in eternity there is not God with an ontological superior or accomplice but

rather just the God who absolutely is and enjoys fullness of life in and of himself.[403]

Indeed, to identify God as *ipsum esse subsistens* is not to rob him of the richness

of his many attributes.[404] Though he calls God *esse tantum*, Thomas clarifies, 'it is not

proper that the remaining perfections and nobilities should be wanting in him. On the

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[401] This of course assumes that God cannot exist and cannot perform any action apart
from being God, or apart from his essence.
[402] See *De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 4, p. 377 and *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4, corp., p. 42 for
Thomas' arguments to the effect that there *can be* but one who is *ipsum esse subsistens*
and that there *must be* one (God) who is *ipsum esse subsistens*.
[403] Compare Davies, 'Simplicity', p. 37.
[404] *Pace* Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 5, 21-2, 27, 55, 57. Nor is
this, in Hughes' words, to postulate that God has 'more' of an 'on-off property'. As
Alsted recognizes, existence does not take embrace *magis* and *minus*, because it is to be
in act, and this is equally in all things that are in act (*Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3, p. 51).
The distinction to be observed here is not quantative but rather concerns the difference
between absolute and underived *esse*, on the one hand, and dependent and derived *esse*,
on the other hand.

contrary, he has all perfections which are in all genera, on account of which he is called simply perfect…but he has these in a mode more excellent to all things, because in him they are one, but in others they have diversity.'[405] All the perfections pre-exist *simpliciter* and *unite* in God.[406] Importantly, in taking a concept such as *ipsum esse* as a schematization of the triune God's whole being, we are engaged in an act of *abstractio praecisiva* rather than *praecisio exclusiva*: 'Those inadequate concepts of the essence of God are presented to us by precisive abstraction, or by simple and negative precision, as I might think of goodness by not thinking of power, but not by exclusive or privative precision, as, for example, I might assert him to be omnipotent, who is neither merciful nor just.'[407] Identifying God as *ipsum esse subsistens* is only a matter of focusing our attention on God in relation to his *esse*, not a matter of denying something of God. It involves a negative not-thinking vis-à-vis other characterizations of God, not a positive thinking-not. Indeed, when we begin to think of God's wisdom, goodness, and so on, we may add that he is not only *ipsum esse subsistens* but also *ipsa sapientia subsistens*, *ipsa bonitas subsistens*, and the rest.

To object that God as *ipsum esse subsistens* in that one *actus essendi* cannot include all the perfections displayed in the economy is arguably to assume that in theological description the *res significata* (God) must correspond exactly to the common referential and denotative dynamics of the diversity in our speech. But the aseity of God precludes that he should participate an *esse commune* or possess really distinct properties (on which, see below), and the plenitude of God precludes that his essence or attributes

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[405] Thomas, *De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 5, p. 378.
[406] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 5, p. 146.
[407] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 5, 4, p. 206.

should be circumscribed by our finite understanding and discourse. Therefore, in ascending to the description of God, our speech concedes its exactitude and comprehensiveness. With this concession, which is in reality only a matter of letting the subject matter govern the method and mode of discourse in theological science, calling God *ipsum esse subsistens* becomes less baffling or perilous. For some, this description of God might still appear disagreeable, but surely it is more disagreeable to have to say that God partakes of an *esse* other than and therefore beyond himself in order to be and to give being to his creatures.

Fourth, God's aseity implies that he is really identical with each of his attributes and is therefore not composed of substance and accidents. Each of God's perfections, then, is a representation of his whole being under some aspect and is therefore not a quality inhering in him.[408] Under the impact of God's aseity, God himself is to be regarded as the fullness of each of his perfections subsisting, lest he should be righteous, good, and so on *per participationem* in order to be as he is and act as he does. As Barth puts it, 'God does not borrow what he is from outside.'[409] Thus, would-be abstracts such

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[408] Each of the perfections does not describe God's being wholly (i.e., exhaustively) but does describe or reference God's whole being.

[409] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 334. Even positing (really distinct) perfections that are not external to God but only in him is insufficient here, for these would still in some sense exceed and govern God and serve to equip God to be what he is. Again, one does not need an all-encompassing Platonist realism about universals in order to sustain the significance of the identification of God with each of his attributes. One example of positing really distinct internal perfections in God is found in Morris' (along with Christopher Menzel's) proposal that God's dependence upon his own properties might be outweighed by their dependence upon him. See Morris, 'Dependence and Divine Simplicity', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 23 (1988), pp. 163-4; and Morris and Menzel, 'Absolute Creation', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986), pp. 353-62. Rejecting divine simplicity while still contending that God is the Creator of all that is other than himself, Morris and Menzel posit that God creates even his own nature, which of course, if it were tenable, would establish the greater dependence of God's perfectons upon him.

as holiness, goodness, or power are made subject to the biblical teaching on the independence and ultimacy of the triune God so that these have no primordial abstractness but are eternally particular in and as God himself. Of course, we cannot formulate an entirely *a priori* definition of a perfection and then hastily identify it as God. While some experience of more or less valid creaturely reflections of power, for example, will precede our ascription of omnipotence to God,[410] God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture has the prerogative to make known what is the true nature of the power of God and how it is shown forth in God's works. Again, Barth's point that in theological description the subject (God) must govern our conception of the predicate (e.g., power or omnipotence) is a generally useful one.[411] In this connection, it is helpful to note that God as *ipsa omnipotentia subsistens* is readily transposed and reoriented as just *Deus omnipotens*.[412]

The self-referential abundance and determinacy of God entail that his being does not admit auxiliaries, which preemptively rules out the presence of accidents. For, strictly speaking, 'accidents are considered to perfect substances.'[413] Such accidental completion of a thing leads back to the problem of positing passive potency in God, or a capacity for enhancement over against his plenitude and perfection: 'For, if there were potency in God, it would be something imperfect or perfectible, of which actus would be

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[410] If it were not so, we would have no acquaintance with the notion of power and would be asked *ex nihilo* to attribute power to God. Such radical conceptual or semantic novelty would be contrary to the way in which God has condescended to commandeer (even as he revises) pre-existing human speech in addressing us.

[411] E.g., Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 524, 564.

[412] This is a favorite way of speaking of the divine attributes in Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, for example.

[413] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 22, p. 104.

perfective, by which some more ultimate perfection would accede to that.'[414] At this

point, it may be evident that this set of concerns differs from the concerns embedded in

recent analytic philosophers' theological affirmation of accidents. For the assumption

here is that the accidents in view would be qualities that function so as to perfect God's

being. By contrast, the assumption in several of the analytic writers is that the relevant

accidents are largely merely contingent predicates to be applied to God (Creator, Lord,

and so on), which illumines why the inclusion of accidents is found to be tenable or,

indeed, necessary in theology proper. The preference here for a classical metaphysics –

which, at any rate, has only a ministerial role in Christian theology – has already been

laid out in chapter two, but a classical framework and Wolterstorff's 'relation' ontology

are not so incommensurate as to prevent a traditional approach from venturing a brief

critique of the inclusion of *potentia passiva* and accidents in the newer tendencies.

In particular, the notion that the accrual of accidents might yield only an

innocuous actualization of God and leave the antedecent actuality of the divine essence

unquestioned remains difficult to uphold. For, if God in his essence is utterly complete

and actual, then he is by his essence already adequate to all his works and need not aspire

to new *actiones* to accomplish these. Therefore, the notion that the inhesion of accidents

should actuate God as to only his *operatio* or *actio* still implicitly calls into question his

essential repletion and actuality. Further, while Richards, for example, suggests a

distinction in God between 'essential' and 'accidental' properties,[415] it is difficult to

partition God's being in such a way that the addition of the latter would not impinge on

the essence. For, in priority to such accidents, there would be only that which is essential

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[414] Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 13, p. 228.
[415] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 231-40.

in God to contain the *potentia passiva* that would facilitate the addition of the accidents. Yet, such *potentia passiva* is contrary to the completeness and actuality of the essence that Richards himself endeavors to preserve. On the one hand, the commitment to the freedom of God and contingency of creation is a salutary one. On the other hand, it will be the burden of one section of chapter five below to suggest that this freedom and contingency can be secured without the introduction of *potentia passiva* in God.

Along with the plenitude of God, the biblical portrayal of the freedom of God also implies the real identity of God and each of his perfections. For he is not externally standardized or brought to account for his deeds in redemptive history but is still accountable to the demands of righteousness and faithfulness. The infamous Euthyphro dilemma, then, is resolved when God is seen to be both free from external ethical measures and also bound in the strictest conformity to what is just and good on account of his real identity with such: 'This position is attractive in that it cuts through the nominalism-realism debate with some ease. God is neither above the standard of justice as its creator, not [*sic*] alongside it as one subject to it just as we are. Rather, his very being is the standard of goodness, etc.'[416]

Finally, God's aseity implies broadly that he is simple in every way and has no composition whatsoever. In his independence and perfection, God himself suffices to account for his own being and does not depend upon underlying parts to be what he is. If there were parts in God, these would stand prior to God and furnish his being: 'parts from which he would be composed would be prior to God, at least in the order of nature as a

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[416] Stephen R. Holmes, '"Something Much Too Plain to Say": Towards a Defence of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001), pp. 152-3.

cause, since every posterior is in some way posterior to the parts from which it is composed.'[417] If God were composed of parts, then he would be perfect in love, for example, by a love other than himself. However, given his self-sufficiency, God is what he has, and this reinforces that he is not suspended *ab alio*. The issue is not merely whether God is *primum ens* only vis-à-vis other substances (*entia primaria*) but, more fundamentally, whether God is *a se* and absolutely such that he is not based on another, whether this 'other' might be *ens primarium* (a substance), *ens secundarium* (an accident), or *principium entis* (essence or existence).[418]

Further, parts themselves would require an agent back of them to bring them together: 'For no parts join themselves....Therefore, if there are parts joined in God, it presupposes a cause prior and superior to God.'[419] This efficient cause could not be God himself. For nothing composite is what it is until it is composed. Therefore, if the efficient cause assembling the divine parts were God himself, this would necessitate that God should, in priority to being God, endeavor to render himself God, and this would be an exercise in the illogic of self-causation.[420]

Possible rejoinders at this point prompt us to contemplate momentarily the notion of divine composition. Exploring the problematic entailments of this notion may seem an obscure venture, but it serves the constructive purpose of contrastively underscoring the

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[417] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 142.

[418] Against Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 33-6. It is not just that there is in the Christian tradition a 'questionable presupposition that simplicity is ontologically superior to compositeness' (Smith, *Oneness and Simplicity of God*, p. 120). Rather, God is recognized to be *a se* and absolute without drawing from and residing under the ontic ressourcement of another, which is then the rationale behind the denial of complexity or composition in God.

[419] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 5, p. 52. See also Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, disp. 13, p. 229.

[420] So Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 18, p. 49.

legitimacy and importance of the doctrine of divine simplicity. One response could be that God might not begin to hold the parts together but would rather possess and unite them from all eternity. But this would still necessitate that, in ontic (if not temporal) priority to his having various perfections (knowledge, love, will, power) that render him what he is and enable him to act, God should already possess features of these in order to unite them, and this becomes, once more, a work of self-causation. From a different angle, to claim that the parts could be prior to God and somehow unite themselves to compose God would be both to overturn the aseity of God and also to attribute agency to that which would be impersonal. There is, finally, the potential claim that the combination of putative divine parts in God could simply be a necessary structure at the foundation of reality, with no question of ontological priority to be negotiated.[421] However, to posit such a necessary structure is to diminish the primacy and ultimacy of God and to reassign these to a blind state of affairs that would stand back of him and back of all reality. Indeed, this would be to subsume God under a higher ontological structure under which he and the creature both would fall at the expense of not only his primacy and ultimacy but also his uniqueness and particularity, which are emphases prized not only among the Reformed orthodox theologians but also among Barth and his heirs in the present time. In sum, then, whether one might seek to advance a divine self-composition or to suggest a divine complexity without composition, God's aseity resists these and requires the conclusion that God is what he has and is in every way simple.

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[421] This appears to be the option espoused in Robert Burns, 'The Divine Simplicity in St Thomas', *Religious Studies* 25 (1989), pp. 271-93. He refers to 'the fundamental premise of the Arab monists that any complexity must be a compound' and chides Thomas for adopting that premise. Yet Burns never refutes the premise itself but only argues that an incomplex first principle cannot account for the diversity and multiplicity found in creation. Positively, he reasons that there is an 'eternal harmony' of divine parts.

iii. Conclusion

This section began with biblical teaching on God's self-sufficiency and abundance of life and characterized the aseity of God in terms of his independence, primacy, plenitude, perfection, and freedom of indifference toward creation. In light of this, this section has argued that God is *actus purus*, *ipsa deitas subsistens*, *ipsum esse subsistens*, really identical with the fullness of each of his perfections, and in every way simple and free from composition. Along the way, several modern concerns about divine simplicity have been met, though responses to these must be inferred from the positive case developed and cumulatively unfolded section by section. In response to concerns of systematic theologians, it should be noted that divine simplicity has been rooted in the teaching of Holy Scripture and in the richness of God's being instead of an essential thinness disparate to God's economic activity. Moreover, the schematization of God as *actus purus* has emphasized God's liveliness and readiness to act *ad extra*, rather than a divine inertia. In response to concerns of analytic philosophers, it should be noted that divine simplicity has divested would-be abstract properties of their purported metaphysical absoluteness and independence instead of leaving God to be an 'abstract object'. Likewise, simplicity has effected a theological redrafting of *esse* so that it is in its primordiality only the biblical God who himself is *ipsum esse subsistens* in multi-faceted richness and whose self-revelation in Scripture in a right *ordo docendi* then governs our understanding of existence. We continue the case for divine simplicity, with its implications for modern reservations about this attribute, in the next chapter.

IV.   An Exegetico-Dogmatic Case for Divine Simplicity (II)

The previous chapter inferred God's simplicity from his singularity and aseity in scriptural teaching. This chapter treats divine simplicity as an implicate of God's immutability and infinity and of the work of *creatio ex nihilo*, advancing the constructive account of simplicity as an attribute emerging from the biblical portrayal of God and subsequently affording opportunities to address questions raised in recent theology and philosophical reflection on the divine attributes.

A.   'No change or shadow of turning': Divine Immutability and Divine Simplicity

In place of considering the biblical teaching on the attribute at hand in a more thematic fashion, the approach here in the exploration of God's immutability will be to examine a few particularly relevant passages that are pivotal in the pursuit of a scriptural conception of God's changelessness. The ensuing elaborative work then draws the connections between God's immutability and his simplicity.

i.   Biblical Teaching

In Numbers 23, Balak, through the prophet Balaam, seeks to persuade God to curse the people of Israel.[422] Though Balaam is a man of dubious character (cf. 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14), it appears that his second oracle in Numbers 23 is truly from

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[422] On Balak's tactics, see Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 199.

Yahweh (23:16), and this oracle accents God's constancy. Balaam proclaims in 23:19,

'God is not a man and he does not lie (וִיכַזֵּב) or a son of man and he does not repent

(וְיִתְנֶחָם). Did he say and he will not do, and did he speak and he will not fulfill it?'

Because of this divine constancy, Balaam will not 'turn back' the blessing of Israel

(23:20). The irreversibility of God's decision persists through the narrative as Balak

continues to urge Balaam to curse God's people (23:25-27; 24:1, 10). The verb נחם in the

hithpael stem in 23:19 has the sense of 'to retract a previously declared action', in this

case the blessing of Israel.[423] Such retraction of course has cognitive and volitional

dimensions, and it is understandable that the word is often represented in English with the

verb 'repent'. The text asserts that, because God is other than vacillating humanity, he

does not do this.[424] Indeed, inasmuch as the Creator never can be translated onto the

plane of creaturely existence,[425] this suggests that God not only does not repent but also

cannot repent. His purpose is not only unchanging but also unchangeable.[426]

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[423] H. van Dyke Parunak, 'A Semantic Survey of NHM', *Biblica* 56 (1975), pp. 522-5.
See also Terence E. Fretheim, 'The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old
Testament God-Talk', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10 (1988), pp. 50-1.
[424] See, e.g., Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction
and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 182.
[425] That is, God as God never becomes a creature, though God in the person of the Son
does assume human nature and thereby partakes of creaturely existence.
[426] *Pace* Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View
of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 80, where the author contends that to say that
God does not (literally) repent in a given circumstance is meaningful only to the extent
that God can (literally) repent. Richard Rice ('Biblical Support for a New Perspective',
in Clark Pinnock et al. [eds.], *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the
Traditional Understanding of God* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1994], p. 33) calls attention to
the fact that in Hosea 11:9 God's refusal to execute his wrath on sinful Israel also is
grounded in the Creator-creature distinction. However, on a closer examination of that
text, it is not repentance *per se* that is deemed proper to God over against the creature but
rather his faithfulness and mercy directed toward his chosen people.

To be sure, in the eyes of some interpreters, this text conveys only that God does not repent as human beings repent.[427] However, the text does not leave open that there might be a 'divine' of repentance but instead teaches that repentance just is peculiar to human creatures. Moreover, given the parallelism conjoining God not repenting and God not lying, to suggest that God may have his own manner of repentance is to insinuate that God may have his own manner of deceiving also, which, presumably, few exegetes would wish to do.[428] Yet, even if it is acknowledged that God does not and cannot repent in Numbers 23:19, one may still wonder whether the divine constancy and unchangeableness in view concern only God's immunity to manipulation and God's determination to bless Israel.[429] If this is the case, that God should never turn away from Israel despite her rebellion is still impressive testimony to the unchangableness of God's purpose and, insofar as immutability of purpose *ad extra* presupposes immutability of

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[427] So Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 199. See also Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 8.

[428] The parallelism is noted by Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, p. 182. It may be a synonymous parallelism or perhaps a synthetic parallelism of intensification. On these dynamics of parallelism in Hebrew literature, see J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 61-86; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), pp. 289-97. Timothy Ashley (*The Book of Numbers*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], p. 477) contends that the verb כזב in 23:19 should in fact be translated 'fail', but most English translations (KJV, NRSV, NIV, ESV, and others) use 'lie'. Regardless of this, the failure in view would be the failure to uphold a promise, which is bound up with deception.

[429] So, e.g., Thomas B. Dozeman, 'The Book of Numbers: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections', in Leander E. Keck et al. (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), pp. 187-8. See also Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1984), p. 267, where the author limits the scope of God's constancy, not by confining it to God's determination to bless Israel, but by averring that it concerns just God's 'larger purpose' in the Old Testament without the details of its outworking.

knowledge, righteousness, power, and so on, to the immutability of God's very nature.[430]

Yet the restriction of God's purposive constancy to his commitment to Israel is not

compulsory since 23:19 may serve as a more general (albeit brief) preface on the

constancy of God that leads into the rest of the oracle, in which the durability of God's

will is applied particularly to his devotion to Israel.[431]

Numbers 23:19 finds a kindred locution in 1 Samuel 15:29: 'The splendor of

Israel does not deal falsely and does not repent (יִנָּחֵם). For he is not a man to repent

(לְהִנָּחֵם).' In this text, king Saul has disregarded God's commandments and the legitimacy

of his reign erodes as God says, 'I repent (נִחַמְתִּי) that I made Saul king' (15:11). When

Samuel informs Saul that God has rejected Saul as king, Saul pleads that the judgment be

revoked. He seizes Samuel and tears Samuel's robe, prompting the prophet to reply that

God has torn the kingdom from Saul and that God does not lie or repent (15:27-29). At

the end of chapter 15, the author writes that Samuel mourned over Saul and that, once

more, God 'repented' (נִחָם) that he anointed Saul to be king (15:35).[432]

With the apparently contradictory remarks about God repenting and not repenting,

this passage is at once puzzling and also useful for ascertaining the contours of God's

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[430] 'The unchangeableness of the divine purposes is a necessary consequence of the unchangeableness of the divine nature' (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Volume I: The Pentateuch (Three Volumes in One)* trans. James Martin [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969], 3:183).

[431] One could flesh out this argument by reasoning that verse 20 begins with the 'presentative particle' הִנֵּה and in so doing appears to introduce the particular circumstances about which the prophet is to speak. On the relevant grammatical function(s) of הִנֵּה, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §40.2.1, pp. 675-8; C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), p. 100; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), §4.5, pp. 157-61.

[432] Other texts in which repentance is predicated of God include Gen. 6:6; Exod. 32:14; 2 Sam. 24:16; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10; 4:2.

constancy and unchangeableness in the Old Testament.[433] Like Balaam's words in

Numbers 23:19, Samuel's response to Saul states baldly that God does not repent because

such an act is peculiar to human persons. Thus, the tension between 15:11, 35 and 15:29

cannot be resolved by saying merely that God repents differently than human beings do.

Some harmonize the divine repentance and constancy by postulating that God's

repentance concerns the appointment of Saul while his constancy concerns just his

commitment to the Davidic line (compare 2 Sam. 7:1-17; Ps. 110:4; 132:11).[434]

However, as Fokkelman points out, Samuel's declaration in 15:29 appears to be 'gnomic

and timeless in its formulation'. Indeed, 'any possible compunction by the deity is a

priori disqualified as being a "lie".'[435] Of course, Fokkelman himself regards this as a

deplorable 'static monumentality' and proceeds to reduce the statement to an expression

of Samuel's need 'to create for himself a handhold outside himself to provide support vis-

à-vis what he experiences from within and is too frightful: instability, chaos, and inability

to be uncertain'.[436] With Fokkelman, Sarot maintains that, because God himself in

15:11a affirms that God repents, this carries more hermeneutical weight than Samuel's

statement in 15:29. Further, Sarot writes, the narrator's inclusion of Samuel's anger in

15:11b prepares the reader for Samuel's corruption of God's word in 15:29. At the end

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[433] The apparent inconsistency in the text has even led some to speculate that 15:29 is a gloss. See P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), p. 268.

[434] So Terence E. Fretheim, 'Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul's Kingship', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985), pp. 595-602; Bruce C. Birch, 'The First and Second Books of Samuel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections', in Leander E. Keck et al. (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 1090. Cf. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 80.

[435] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses; Volume II: The Crossing Fates (I Sam. 13-31 & II Sam. 1)* (Assen and Dover: Van Gorcum, 1986), p. 107.

[436] Fokkelman, *Narrative and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, p. 107.

of the passage, the narrator then 'explicitly corrects Samuel's distortion of this revelation', offering 'a superb vindication of God's repentance' (15:35).[437] However, this reading becomes implausible when one notes that Samuel's proclamation of God's constancy is not engineered to secure Samuel's own preferred outcome, namely, the perdurance of Saul's reign. His proclamation of God's constancy is, rather, a deference to the word of God concerning Saul, which challenges the notion that Samuel is speaking out of turn in 15:29. We are then left, it seems, with a sweeping iteration of God's constancy coming from the lips of a prophet aligning himself with God's word. We still therefore face the question of the coherence of 15:11, 35 and 15:29.[438]

Given that 15:29 teaches that repentance is proper not to the Creator but to the creature, it is fitting to take the divine repentance in 15:11, 35 as metaphorical or anthropopathic.[439] This is not to belittle or discard these verses but rather to allow their own content and role in the text itself to establish their theological import.[440] On this reading, divine regret or repentance does not indicate a literal emotional flux in God or a literal alteration of the purpose of God but instead respects God's acts and effects. It is

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[437] Marcel Sarot, 'Does God Suffer? A Critical Discussion of Thomas G. Weinandy's *Does God Suffer?*', *Ars Disputandi* 1 (2001), p. 6.

[438] This is not to imply that Samuel is utterly flawless in his thinking. By the end of the chapter, he has returned to mourning the end of Saul's reign and is chastised by God (15:35-16:1).

[439] A number of modern commentators countenance the anthropopathic interpretation. See R. P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), p. 144; David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 396.

[440] A number of authors are unclear on what it means to take certain statements to be metaphorical. For example, Boyd (*God of the Possible*, p. 81) argues against the presence of metaphor here: 'If we read in context, both sets of verses may be affirmed as accurately depicting God as he really is.' But taking divine repentance in 15:11, 35 as metaphorical does not entail denying that these verses 'accurately depict God'; it entails taking them to do so in a certain manner.

predicated of God on the basis of a similitude between certain of the acts and effects of

God and certain of the acts and effects of human agents who, before and in those acts, are

inwardly pained and altering their intentions.[441] In other words, it is predicated of God

because, in working a change in this situation, God does what a rueful human being

normally does. Such metaphorical description is crucial in helping us to perceive that,

while God is not changing his will, he is willing a change.[442] If one draws a logical

distinction between God's will and God's essence,[443] then this constancy of will

presupposes a corresponding constancy or immutability of essence. For unchangeable

volition turns on unchangeable knowledge to understand and foresee what is to be done,

unchangeable righteousness to pursue the right according to one's promises,

unchangeable power to accomplish one's purposes, and so on. Accordingly, as in

Numbers 23:19, there is in 1 Samuel 15:29 biblical witness to God's immutable purpose

and to his immutable nature as well. Yet, *pace* Fokkelman, immutability does not entail

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[441] On theological metaphor trading on similitude of effect, see Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 2, ad 2, p. 32; qu. 19, art. 11, p. 249; qu. 20, art. 1, ad 2, p. 253; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, pp. 108-15.

[442] Walter Brueggemann (*First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990], pp. 115-16) insists that Saul cannot be 'a mere pawn in Yahweh's larger intention' or 'caught in a struggle which for Yahweh was never serious, because from the beginning Saul was fated to be rejected'. For this would be 'theologically abhorrent'. Yet this is to assume that God's purpose must be mutable in order to preserve the integrity of human agents. It is to assume also that the immutability of God's decretive will generates an inevitability in creaturely action that is akin to fate. Both of these assumptions can be countered by Reformed expositions of divine providence in which God actively wills to permit creaturely deeds for which creatures remain responsible and in which God does so as the personal God whose wisdom and goodness are diametrically opposed to blind and cruel fate.

[443] If God is indeed simple, then this can be only a logical distinction. For the will as *voluntas* or *actus volendi* is really identical to the divine essence.

lifelessness; it entails that, as the ever-living and already-active one, God is and works in creation without passivity, indecision, or self-capitulation.[444]

Psalm 102 also attests God's constancy. The heavens and the earth will perish, but God remains. God himself will change them 'like a garment', but God is the same (וְאַתָּה־הוּא), and his years do not end (102:26-27).[445] Here the variability and fleetingness of creation are foils for the enduring unchangeability and permanence of God. While, like 1 Samuel 15:29, this text impresses upon us that Scripture develops its account of God by contrasting him with created being, the psalmist also applies this declaration of divine stability to the promises of redemptive history: Yahweh's immanent stability ensures that the children of his servants will dwell in his presence.

In prophetic disputation in Malachi, Yahweh announces a coming judgment and purging of Israel (2:17-3:5) and then pauses to comment on the current condition of his people in 3:6-12.[446] In 3:6, Yahweh asserts, 'Truly, I, Yahweh, do not change, so you, sons of Jacob, are not ended' (3:6b).[447] To the extent that Yahweh's present (as opposed to past or future) constancy is the most likely ground for the contemporaneous command of repentance in 3:7, the verb שָׁנִיתִי ('change') in the perfect conjugation probably respects

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[444] Though the present work diverges at certain key points from Barth's description of immutability, compare the comments on God's life and immutability in *CD*, II/1, p. 495.

[445] On the pronoun הוא conveying consistency and sameness, see Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), p. 216.

[446] On the structure and flow of the text, see Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1984), pp. 331-2; Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 298-9.

[447] On the grammatical function and translation of כִּי (here, 'truly'), see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §39.3.4e, p. 665; Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 294.

the present time (so NIV, NRSV, ESV, and other English translations), and 'I, Yahweh,

do not change' might be taken as a gnomic statement.[448] One could also reason that the

verb has a perfective aspect so as to report 'this truth as a fact of history but also as

significant for the present. The Lord has not changed in the past and this is also

applicable in the present time.'[449] The constancy of Yahweh appears to function as the

basis of the continued existence and prospects of Israel, and thus the *waw* in וְאַתֶּם appears

to have an inferential (so 'therefore' in NRSV, ESV, and others) or resultative force (so

'so' in NIV).[450] The point is not that alongside of Yahweh's constancy is Israel's

constancy in sin (as in, they have not 'completed' or 'ended' in their sin) but rather that,

because of Yahweh's constancy, Israel endures as a people: 'Despite slavery in Egypt,

various military defeats, and exile in Mesopotamia, they still exist as an identifiable,

social, political (though now dependent), and religious entity.'[451]

A number of commentators underscore the economic focus of God's constancy

and faithfulness here: '[God] presses forward through Israel's history to fulfill his

purpose of love for his world.'[452] Some explicitly contrast this with reading 3:6 as 'a

theological commentary on the nature of God's being'.[453] However, it must be said that

constancy in the economy implies constancy in being as well: '[God's] purposes and his

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[448] On the gnomic or 'proverbial' perfect, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 30.5.1c, p. 488; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 3.2.1e, p. 56.
[449] Verhoef, *Books of Haggai and Malachi*, p. 299.
[450] On which usage of *waw*, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 39.2.1d-39.2.2a, p. 650.
[451] David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 213.
[452] Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), p. 186.
[453] Hill, *Malachi*, p. 295.

covenant promises are as solid and permanent as the nature and character of God.'[454] Yet

one may still argue that, since God says he will 'turn' to Israel in 3:7, God is not entirely

unchangeable in this passage. In response one can point out that, significantly, Israel

must first turn to God and then after this God will turn to her. One can then argue either

that the variability of Israel conditions God or that, should Israel return, Israel will relate

differently to the constant God and in this sense will experience a divine 'turning'. If we

wish to avoid the logical conclusion that Israel conditions God such that her fickleness

and disobedience are able to produce a waning in God's love for Israel, which Israel's

repentance can later serve to rekindle, the latter interpretation – that, should Israel return,

they will take up a new relation to Yahweh and experience him in his constancy in a

different way – is preferable. For otherwise, against the message of the Old Testament,

it would be the case that Israel merits and intensifies God's care instead of being, in all

her weakness and unworthiness, anticipated and borne along by the ardor of God's

unwavering love.[455] Thus, it seems viable to conclude that, as Yahweh attests his own

covenantal constancy *ad extra* in Malachi 3:6, he also implicitly attests his own intrinsic

constancy in which he remains the same even as his creatures take up a new posture

before him.

As we shift to the New Testament, we meet a robust witness to God's constancy

and unchangeableness in the book of Hebrews. Having warned of the ravages of

apostasy (5:11-6:8), the author assures his readership of his belief that they will be among

those who inherit God's promises (6:9-12). Mention of God's promises then prompts a

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[454] Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, New American
Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), p. 402.
[455] Compare Richard Muller's reading of Malachi 3:6 in 'Incarnation, Immutability, and
the Case for Classical Theism', *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983), pp. 31-3.

demonstration of the surety of those promises in 6:13-18. Since there was no one greater

by whom God might swear, God swore by himself that he would bless and multiply

Abraham, and it came to pass (6:13-15; see also Gen. 22:16).[456] Given that the taking of

an oath is thought to be a decisive indication that one will keep one's word, God

guaranteed with an oath the 'unchangeableness of his purpose' (Heb. 6:16-17). This is

echoed in the citation of Psalm 110:4 regarding the priestly order of Melchizedek: 'The

Lord swore and he will not repent. "You are a priest forever"' (Heb. 7:21).

> That God is unchanging in his designs and that his word is firm and secure are
> constant affirmations of the biblical tradition. These affirmations were
> subsequently repeated and expanded in all strands of the Jewish tradition, by
> Qumran sectarians, Philo, and the Rabbis. This widespread tradition about God's
> immutability underlies Hebrews's affirmation.[457]

God guaranteed with an oath the unchangeableness of his purpose with the aim of

encouraging perseverance in hope. This encouragement occurs 'through two

unchangeable things, in which God is not able to lie' (6:18). The 'two unchangeable

things' here appear to be God's word and the oath that confirms it.[458] In these it is

impossible that God should lie. As in Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29, God's

decretive and promissory constancy is linked with his inability to deceive. The

encouragement wrought by divine oath is our anchor and hope which penetrates to the

inner sanctuary where Jesus ministers continually as high priest (6:19-20).

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[456] On God swearing by himself in the thought-world of ancient Judaism, see Craig R.
Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible
(New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 325.

[457] Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the
Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 181.

[458] So, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., New International
Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1990), p.
154.

Once more, it is well to note that constancy of purpose *ad extra* presupposes constancy of being as well; God remains perfectly faithful to his people precisely because he himself does not change. This is corroborated in the final chapter of Hebrews. In 13:8 we read that 'Jesus Christ yesterday and today is the same (ὁ αὐτὸς) and forever.'[459] As William Lane observes, this verse is a bridge between 13:7 and 13:9.[460] The faith of the departed leaders in 13:7 should still be imitated at present because the object of that faith, Jesus Christ, has not passed away but remains the same. The sameness and continuity of Christ is then the reason that in 13:9 the readers must not go after novel or strange teaching. However, Lane deduces, 'Accordingly, v 8 is not to be interpreted as an acclamation of Jesus' timeless ontological immutability….The reference is rather to the immutability of the gospel message proclaimed by the deceased leaders in the recent past.'[461] Yet it is not the gospel but Christ himself that is said always to remain the same. Owen comments that the author has in view, not Christ 'metonymically for his doctrine', but instead the person of Christ himself.[462] Indeed, even if 13:8 'speaks not of his person absolutely, but with respect to his office', still '[i]t is from his divine person, that, in the discharge of his office, he was…the same.'[463] In other words, 13:8 concerns Christ himself in his salvific work, the constancy and endurance of which rest on Christ himself *qua Deus* remaining ὁ αὐτός (cf. 1:10-12). Lane himself recognizes that there is a need to

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[459] On αὐτός in its function as the 'identifying adjective', see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 349-50.

[460] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), p. 528. Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 346.

[461] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 528.

[462] John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with the Preliminary Exercitations*, vol. 4, rev. ed. (London, 1790), p. 393.

[463] Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 393.

ground the constancy and enduring validity of the gospel in some deeper constant.[464] Curiously, though, he opts for 'the transcendent dignity of Jesus Christ' rather than the self-sameness of Christ as God that is explicitly underscored earlier in Hebrews and is thus a more likely ground for a kerygmatic constancy in 13:8.[465]

In the next catholic epistle there is yet another strong statement about God's constancy. James writes, 'Every good gift and every perfect present from above is coming down from the Father of lights, with whom (παρ' ᾧ) there is no change (παραλλαγὴ) or shadow of turning (τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα)' (1:17). In this passage it is emphasized that no one is tempted by God to sin, for God is 'unable to be tempted' (ἀπείραστός) (1:13).[466] By one's own inordinate desires one is tempted and enticed to commit sin, which begets death (1:14-15). In view of this, James exhorts us not to be deceived about God (1:16) but to trust that instead of luring us into sin God is the one who gives good gifts and does so without variation (1:17). As God is said to be the father of the heavenly lights in 1:17, the verse contains semi-technical astronomical language.[467] The terms παραλλαγή and τροπή are employed in extrabiblical literature to describe the variation of the heavenly lights, the latter often in relation to the solstice.[468] The noun ἀποσκίασμα, then, may be taken as 'the shadow cast by the alteration of a heavenly

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[464] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 528.
[465] Compare Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 393; Johnson, *Hebrews*, p. 346.
[466] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 100.
[467] So many commentators. See, e.g., Martin Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ed. Helmut Koester, rev. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 100-3.
[468] James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 162, 164; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos, 2000), p. 78.

light'.[469] Pointing up the Creator-creature distinction, 1:17 thus contrasts God with the

changing of the heavenly bodies, which are among creation's most ostensibly constant

features.[470] With the attributive usage of the prepositional phrase παρ' ᾧ, James

highlights that God is impervious to change over against creaturely flux.[471] In this way,

God's constancy in giving good gifts (1:5, 17a) is funded by his own essential constancy

(1:17b).[472] Perhaps it ought not to be pressed too confidently, but it is worth observing

that the shifting of the heavenly bodies is chiefly a matter of their changing in relation to

other entities. Perhaps, then, when James draws the Creator-creature distinction with

reference to the heavenly lights, he tacitly removes from God even dispositional and

relational change.

ii.   *Ad Simplicitatem*

In several places the biblical teaching pertaining to God's immutability deals

principally with the unchanging purpose of God *pro nobis* (Numb. 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29;

Heb. 6:13-18), but even here it gestures toward the unchangability of God in his essence

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[469] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 197.

[470] E.g., Johnson, *Letter of James*, p. 197. Scot McKnight (*The Letter of James*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011], pp. 127-8) muses that God's constancy might be highlighted here by comparing it to the relative constancy of the heavenly bodies as well as by contrasting it with their fluctuation. The majority of commentators favor the latter interpretation.

[471] Compare the attributive usage in Mark 10:27; Rom. 2:11; 9:14; Eph. 6:9. On this prepositional phrase, see, for example, Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans; Bletchley: Paternoster, 1982), p. 87.

[472] Cf. Ropes, *Epistle of St. James*, p. 161; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1988), p. 39.

and perfections. If he does not deviate from his good purposes, it is owing to an

immanent definiteness and immutability of what he is as God.[473] Further, some

pericopae do speak more directly to the immutability of God himself and so implicitly to

the immutability of God in his essence (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Jas. 1:17). All of this funds

a conception of God's immutability as, negatively, his insusceptibility to becoming or

change in essence, perfections, or decree and as, positively, the indefeasible sameness

and steadfastness with which he is himself and acts toward us.

To be sure, there are a number of scriptural passages in which God regrets,

repents, or relents (Gen. 6:6; Numb. 14:11-20; 25:10-11; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 2 Sam. 24:15-

16; Jonah 3:10; 4:2). Yet, with the metaphorical understanding of such locutions

buttressed by the (materially intratextual, not externally or violently imposed) Creator-

creature distinction in the discussion of 1 Samuel 15 (cf. Prov. 19:21; Isa. 46:8-11), these

theologoumena may be taken to indicate a change 'not by reason of the counsel [of God],

but of the event, not of the will itself, but of the thing willed, not of affect and internal

sorrow, but of effect and external work, because [God] does what a penitent man is wont

to do.' Thus, God is said to repent *non* παθητικῶς *sed* ἐνεργητικῶς.[474] Each willing of a

change on the part of God is already enfolded and anticipated in the active priority of his

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[473] 'The "economic" affirmations concerning immutability lead one to acknowledge, as
the basis for this economy, the immutability of the being of God' (Gilles Emery, 'The
Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the
"Suffering of God"', in James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, eds., *Divine
Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* [Grand Rapids and Cambridge:
Eerdmans, 2009], p. 61).
[474] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 11, 11, p. 227.

decretive will and occurs not with respect to the divine plan or *operatio* but with respect to the *opera*.[475]

In light of the general biblical testimony to God's constancy and the more specific testimony to his constancy vis-à-vis the circumstances of creation (1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17), it may be added more broadly that God is immutable in his relationship to creatures.[476] If God's all-knowing, all-wise decree actively anticipates all the turnings of creaturely life and history, then it is appropriate to say that God does not change in relation to his creatures; rather, his creatures change in relation to him and begin accordingly to experience his constant holiness and love in different ways. Given God's independence, immanent abundance, and freedom with respect to creation, the relation between God and creation is a *relatio rationis ex parte Dei*. That is, God's being does not imply creation and is not determined in any way by creation.[477] Yet this relation is a *relatio realis ex parte creaturae*. That is, the creature is indeed determined by its relation to God. Given God's immutability, 'insofar as God is always remaining the same and always existing outside the order of creatures, he is not referred to them otherwise except

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[475] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 7, 6, p. 109.

[476] Even those who affirm the immutability of God with regard to his essence, perfections, and purpose often do not wish to apply this attribute to God's relationship to creatures. See, e.g., Bruce Ware, 'An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986), pp. 438-41; John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), pp. 275-6.

[477] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 13, p. 212; IV, qu. 2, 13, p. 346. Scott Swain comments (*God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology*, Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013], p. 87) that the God-world relation is not 'ontologically constitutive' on God's side. Yet, Turretin states, this relation involves two real extremes and can in this sense be called a *relatio realis* (*Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 1, 11, p. 476; cf. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 134). The aim, then, in maintaining the *relatio rationis* on the part of God is only to underscore God's aseity, not to 'protect God from contamination by too close a brush with the world (Fretheim, 'Repentance of God', p. 64).

insofar as creatures are referred to him.'[478] God's aseity and God's immutability thus together imply that God does not change in relation to the creature. Instead, the creature changes in relation to him without any change in the God who is already immanently determinate in his own plenitude and whose eternal decretive act wisely encloses all the travails of redemptive history. This does not represent an 'inflexible immobility' on God's part,[479] for God's economic liveliness and dexterity are preserved in the recognition of God's prevenient abundance, in which God's eternal life 'encircles all divisible times, not co-extensively or formally, but eminently and indivisibly' as God acts with perfect actuality and suppleness to engage his creatures.[480] In view of God's immutability with respect to his essence, perfections, decree, and relation *ad creaturas*, he may be called simple in at least three ways.

First, God's immutability implies that God is *actus purus* and is therefore not composed of potentiality and actuality. In the previous chapter, we examined how God's determinate plenitude implies that he is wholly in act since he cannot be caused *ab alio* or elevated to a new state of completeness. From another vantage point – that of the divine constancy – we add now that God's immutability implies that he is already established as he is and is therefore *actus purus* with no passive potency by which he should become or develop. The attributes of aseity and immutability join together in anchoring the claim that God is wholly in act: because of the plenitude and perfection of God, the attribute of immutability encapsulates not only that God cannot change but indeed that he *need not*

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[478] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 6, p. 265.
[479] As suggested by Barth in *CD*, II/1, pp. 496-9, where he advocates a 'holy mutability' or an 'elasticity' of God according to which he has a 'capacity to alter His attitudes and actions' and thereby change in relation to his creatures.
[480] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 10, 6, p. 223; 11, p. 224.

change, for in so doing he would undergo a process of becoming or self-actualization inimical to his perfection and superfluous to the advance agility of his working *pro nobis*.

In keeping with the line of reasoning employed in considering the connection between aseity and simplicity, this means that God's being excludes even a *prima facie* agreeable passive potency. In his abundant life, God's essence and his *operatio*, whereby he acts in creation and providence, are identical. God therefore is immutable in the force of his *operatio* toward creatures without becoming or alteration, which entails that in both *actus primus* (*essentia*) and *actus secundus* (*operatio* or *actio)* he is *actus purus*. Though 'no *actio* proceeding from the free will [of God] can be God absolutely and in himself…nevertheless it can be called well God relatively (σχετικῶς) viewed.'[481] So creation, for example, 'actively considered does not differ from the essence of God itself, nor is it but God creating [*Deus creans*]'.[482] Thus, with the all-sufficient fullness of God's being in place, even a becoming as to redemptive-historical action would entail an undue augmenting and changing of the God of Holy Scripture, who in his immutability is *actus purus* without passivity or attunement to maturation.[483]

Second, God's immutability implies that he is really identical with each of his perfections and is not composed of substance and accidents. As the enduringly selfsame God, he is what he has and does not acquire new *qualitates* or *habitus* that might change or bolster his being or his ability to act. For these are things 'introduced into a man with

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[481] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 1, 15, p. 344.
[482] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 5, 6, p. 313.
[483] The way in which this comports with the contingency of creation and history will be discussed below in chapter five.

which he is fit for these operations which he is not able to send forth by nature alone'.[484]

In other words, in the discussion of immutability, the accrual of accidents cannot be set aside as a mild form of becoming in human persons or, by extension, in God. By contrast, God by his own nature already contains all that might be required for his action in creation. In his immutability, then, in which he remains constant without becoming or enhancement, God does not receive accidents but is really identical with each of his perfections.[485]

The concern behind the negation of substance-accidents complexity in the present work shores up again the difference between a more classical and a common analytic understanding of accidents. Here these are regarded as inhering, perfective qualities incongruous with God's changelessness; there they are often regarded as contingent predicates (e.g., Creator, Lord, mercy) applied to God on supposition of his free decision to create and act in history. Yet, even when the basis for positing accidents in God is the (legitimate) commitment to God's freedom in his action *pro nobis*, it should be noted that the construal of mercy, for example, as an accident implies that God would acquire a new *habitus* whereby his love would be equipped to console suffering persons. But this is

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[484] Keckermann, *Systema Logica*, lib. 1, sect. 1, cap. 9, p. 596 (incorrect pagination in original). Compare Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 4, p. 258.

[485] The argument here strictly points to just the identity of the divine perfections with divine nature, but, insofar as God is identical with his own nature, this entails that God is identical with each of his perfections and is not composed by them. One could object that the negative and more modest claim that there are no accidents in God does not necessitate the positive and broader claim that God is really identical with all of his perfections. One could argue further that the presence of really distinct perfections might be eternal so that God should never have to accrue these over against the doctrine of divine immutability. However, the general problems with divine complexity and composition (outlined in the section on aseity and in this section below) call into question whether such complexity can in fact be distanced from developmental accrual. In view of this, the negation of substance-accidents composition in God can be reframed positively in terms of the identity of God with his perfections.

arguably in conflict with God's immutability, according to which he does not – indeed

need not – undergo processes of development for the sake of his providential oversight.

Positively, the construal of divine names or perfections such as Creator or mercy as

relative attributes (rather than accidents) recognizes both that these turn on God's

contingent determation for creation and also that these are simply modulations of the

already-actual perfections of power and love with no entailment of divine

development.[486]

Third, God's immutability implies that God is simple in every way with no

complexity or composition at all. The constancy and indivisibility of God are secured by

the simplicity of God, while mutability and divisibility are funded by complexity and

composition. So Charnock: '[God's] immutability depends on His simplicity. He is

unchangeable in his essence, because he is a pure and unmixed spiritual Being.

Whatsoever is compounded of parts may be divided into those parts, and resolved into

those distinct parts which make up and constitute the nature.'[487] Again, 'where…through

composition there is a uniting of parts, there also a dissolution of the same can occur.'[488]

Accordingly, God's simplicity secures that he is the constant and reliable God with no

capacity (i.e., deficiency) as to foregoing something that belongs to him and to his

character.

One might object that this is too generic an account of complexity and may not be

applicable to God. One might contend then for a divine complexity that is necessary and

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[486] For further exposition of the notion of relative attributes and the relationship between
the freedom and actuality of God, see chapter five below.
[487] Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:187.
[488] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 21, p. 103.

irrevocable with no risk of divisibility.[489] Such a hypothesis elicits several comments.

First, complexity cannot be absolutely necessary but, at best, hypothetically necessary.

For the amalgamation of parts arises from an antecedent determination about those parts:

'for, if there is composition, it is from many; but, things which are many according to

themselves, would not convene into one unless they were united by something

composing.'[490] Nor could a divine self-composition be enfolded into the absolute

necessity of God's self-willing. For, it would require that God should cause himself to be

what he is instead of simply delighting in his own goodness and perfection as in a

traditional account of the divine will. If one should claim that parts in God just are

absolutely necessarily joined together, this would mean propping up a necessity which

enervates God's definitiveness and ultimacy by placing him under a governing

ontological matrix and which runs aground on the fact that, instead of underlying things

that exist, modality supervenes on the structure of those things.[491] God is not God

because he is *ens necessarium*; he is *ens necessarium* by virtue of what he is as God.

Divine complexity thus has no recourse to an absolutely necessary unity of

putative divine parts and is left to explore the prospects of a hypothetical or suppositional

necessity to uphold the immutability and indivisibility God. A suppositional necessity

could not have God as the one who 'supposes' the union of his own parts, for this would

ultimately be a matter of self-causation: God would stand (at least in ontological or

theological priority) back of what he is as God and would then compose himself or render

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[489] So Morris, 'On God and Mann', pp. 316-17. Compare Richard Swinburne, 'How the Divine Properties Fit Together: A Reply to Gwiazda', *Religious Studies* (2009), pp. 495-8.

[490] Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 18, 4, p. 49.

[491] See again Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, pp. 1-12; Dolezal, *God without Parts*, pp. 143-44n50.

himself what he is. Yet, a suppositional necessity prosecuted by another is excluded by God's aseity and ultimacy.[492] Divine complexity, then, can claim neither God himself, nor a sheer necessity, nor another being back of God as a safeguard against divine divisibility or dissolubility. All of this throws into relief that it is crucial to affirm that the biblical God is *simplex omnino* in order to confirm that he is truly unchangeable and trustworthy.

iii.   Conclusion

In treating God's immutability in relation to his simplicity, this section has considered Old Testament and New Testament texts that bear witness to the constancy of God's purpose and essence, which constancy has been amplified in the statement that God's immutability is, negatively, the insusceptibility of his essence, perfections, and decree to becoming and change and, positively, the selfsameness and steadfastness with which he is himself and acts toward us. With this formulation in hand, we have traced the manner in which God's immutability implies that he is *actus purus*, really identical with his own perfections, and entirely simple so that he is without any parts whatsoever. Once more there is occasion to mention briefly the bearing of this material on the objections to divine simplicity found among modern Christian thinkers, and two points in particular are worth making. First, the theological import of the economy of salvation is well-marked in the move from divine immutability to divine simplicity. For God's

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[492] In this connection, Voetius (*Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, pars 1, disp. 13, p. 229) asks, 'But where and what is that cause prior and superior to God which composes the substance of God?'

191

constancy in the history of Israel (and the church) is among the factors driving a traditional doctrine of divine immutability and so a traditional doctrine of divine simplicity too. Second, God's liveliness and attentiveness to humanity are honored even when – or, better, *precisely* when – God is called *actus purus*. For, while God's undifferentiated actuality does preclude that he should change in *operatio* from one divine act to the next, it does so, not because God is immobile, but because he is changelessly and simultaneously poised to act at every juncture of history in the accomplishment of salvation and judgment. Having followed three threads (God's singularity, aseity, and immutability) in the case for the doctrine of divine simplicity, we continue the argument with two more.

B.   'His greatness is unsearchable': Divine Infinity and Divine Simplicity

i.   Biblical Teaching

It has been argued in the section on God's singularity that, with respect to 'discrete quantity' or *numerus transcendentalis*, God is one. At the same time, it is to be argued here that, with respect to 'continual quantity' or *magnitudo* ('greatness'), God is infinite.[493] God's infinity may be taken either absolutely and as to the divine essence or with relation (*cum* σχέσει) to place as *immensitas* and *ubiquitas* and to time or duration as

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[493] On this distinction, see Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 1, p. 117.

aeternitas.[494] Further, God's infinity can be considered either distinctly as his limitless perfection or as a descriptor of each of his attributes.[495] Here it is taken principally under the former aspect as a divine attribute in its own right, but this is apprehensible only by its relative manifestation in connection with various divine attributes and their significance *ad creaturas*. To unfold the conception of infinity held here in its exegetical moorings, the unbounded greatness of God, the ubiquity and immensity of God, and the perfection of sundry attributes of God receive attention. In reading Scripture in with an eye to the infinity of God, it should be observed that the biblical text contains this notion not verbally or explicitly (*rhētōs*) but in the material judgment (*dianoia*) of the authors,[496] demanding that the exegete penetrate to the implicit (though still theologically authoritative) content of the biblical teaching.

First, in numerous biblical texts, God and his works are called 'great', often with the Hebrew גָּדוֹל (Exod. 18:11; Deut. 7:21; 11:7; Judg. 2:7; 1 Chron. 16:25; 2 Chron. 2:4; Neh. 8:6; Ps. 77:13; 86:10; 99:2; 135:5; Isa. 12:6; Jer. 32:18) and the Greek μέγας (Titus 2:13; Rev. 15:3). The lexica note that such terminology can be used to convey that something is great in different respects, including number or multitude, magnitude or extent, and importance or superiority,[497] and it is the second sense that is most pertinent to a description of divine infinity. In the discourse of Job, there is testimony to God's magnitude and incomprehensibility that is paired with the innumerability of God's

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[494] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 1, p. 117. Compare Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 8, 1, p. 213.

[495] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 5, p. 118.

[496] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 6, p. 118.

[497] Brown, et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1419, p. 153; Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, pp. 623-4.

mighty deeds: God does great things (גְדֹלוֹת) beyond searching, and his deeds are beyond

number (5:9; 9:10). 'God is great (שַׂגִּיא) and he is not known. The number of his years is

not a thing searched out' (36:26).[498] In Psalm 145, David sings, 'Great (גָּדוֹל) is Yahweh

and being praised exceedingly, and to his greatness (וְלִגְדֻלָּתוֹ) there is no searching

(145:3).' Mastricht comments, 'Of his magnitude there is no investigation….For what is

finite, that is also investigable, and, on the other hand, what is *simpliciter* unable to be

investigated, that is also infinite.'[499]

Alongside these explicit affirmations of God being 'great', there are other texts

that (materially) accomplish the same: 'Do you find out the depths of God? Do you find

out as far as the extremities of the Almighty? Higher than heaven – what do you do?

Deeper than *sheol* – what do you know? Longer than earth is his robe and broader than

the sea' (Job 11:7-9). In the book of Isaiah, the prophet asks who has measured the

waters, the heavens, the dust and mountains of the earth, implying that Yahweh has done

this. The prophet then queries who has measured (תִכֵּן) the Spirit of Yahweh or who has

given counsel to Yahweh (Isa. 40:12-14).[500] Importantly, this passage contains the

distinction between an *infinitum improprium* that 'has passing over [*transitus*] and an

end' but 'cannot be easily completed', and an *infinitum proprie* and *actu* that 'surely

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[498] While some of these statements about God's greatness are uttered by Job's friends, who prove to be unwise counselors, it is not just falsehood or half-truths that can be found in their words. Some of their pontifications are in fact truthful, despite their being moored in a deficient theological framework.

[499] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 2.2c, p. 117. Because the name Yahweh is connected to the statement 'I AM what I AM', Mastricht reasons that 'Great is Yahweh' is a clear affirmation of the greatness of God's essence (*Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 2.1, p. 117). However, it seems unlikely that the text by itself invites this connection.

[500] The *piel* stem of תכן carries the sense of 'to mete out', but the contrast with the verbs of measurement and containment in verse 12 (שקל, קול, מדד) suggests that the 'meting out' entails measurement.

194

exceeds every head and measurement'.[501] While the stars of the heavens and the grains

of the sand along the sea cannot be numbered by humanity (Gen. 15:5; 32:12), these can

be measured by God (Isa. 40:12, 26). By contrast, the Spirit of Yahweh simply cannot be

measured at all (40:13).[502] Accordingly, he is the utterly incomparable one before whom

the nations are nothing (40:15-25).

Second, God's ubiquity in Scripture supplies further evidence for the immensity

and infinity of his essence. After erecting the temple in Jerusalem, Solomon asks

whether God will in fact dwell on earth, for the highest heaven cannot contain him (1

Kings 8:27). Similarly, in Isaiah 66:1-2, Yahweh himself points out that heaven is his

throne and the earth his footstool. Where, therefore, should there be a house built for

him? Having made all things, he transcends the creaturely strictures of locality.

Stephen's speech in Acts draws attention to God's transcendence of locality in rejecting

that God should live in houses built by human hands (Acts 7:48-50, quoting Isaiah 66:1-

2). Paul concurs at the Areopagus, proclaiming to the Athenians that the 'unknown God'

does not live in temples built by human hands (Acts 17:24-28).

Yet, God does not only surpass all circumscription; rather, God's freedom from

spatial confinement is also his positive capacity for unrestricted nearness to all creatures

in all places. Meditating upon God's perfect knowledge of his resting and rising, David

asks where he could go from the Spirit of Yahweh or from his presence. For Yahweh is

in the heavens and in the depths and on the far side of the sea (Ps. 139:7-12). In this vein,

in the prophecy of Jeremiah, Yahweh asks where a man can hide since he fills heaven

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[501] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 19, pp. 160-2. Compare Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 8, 2, p. 213.

[502] The former are infinite *quoad nos* while the latter is infinite *in se* (Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 8, 2, p. 213).

and earth (Jer. 23:24; cf. Eph 1:23). Indeed, in God we 'live and move and are' (Acts 17:28) and in Christ 'all things hold together' (Col. 1:17). Hence 'the "otherness" of God over against created space' is also 'the divine capacity to stand in relation to space and to act in space without compromise to the divine freedom'.[503] Of course, God dwells peculiarly in the heavenly realm (e.g., Ps. 2:4; 115:3; Isa. 66:1; Heb. 9:24; Rev. 4:1-5:14) and is especially near to his people (Matt. 28:20; Phil. 4:5, 9), who also can draw near to him (Jas. 4:8). Yet, this is a matter of special manifestations of divine glory, of special actions of God in judgment, salvation, and consolation, and, in the case of our drawing near to God, our prayerful ethical conformity to his will, none of which moderates God's effective *praesentia generalis*, which 'abstracts from all these singular modes'.[504] Indeed, the shape of God's redemptive-historical nearness is grounded precisely in his essential *immensitas*.[505]

This biblical dynamic of divine transcendence of space and divine nearness in space implies that God's filling all things does not entail an enmeshment or composition with them. God is *extra ordinem creaturarum* so that his essence is not terminated or distinguished contrastively by the essence of another and is not situated within the creaturely field of differentiation.[506] As Christopher Franks writes, 'God is somehow other than the whole order of being itself, capable of presence in that order in such a way that no corresponding absence of created being is required.'[507] In this way, God is not

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[503] John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005), p. 96.
[504] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 9, 3, p. 216; 15, p. 220; 23, p. 221.
[505] Compare Webster, *Confessing God*, pp. 91-2.
[506] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 9, 17, p. 220.
[507] Christopher A. Franks, 'The Simplicity of the Living God: Aquinas, Barth, and Some Philosophers', *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), p. 296. Franks' comments are directed

ubique by 'physical contact or any co-mingling or composition but as the efficient and conserving cause of all things'[508]. Along with the greatness of God in Scripture, the ubiquity of God, according to which God is present to all without being demarcated by any, implies that God as God or in his essence is infinite. Put differently, the ubiquity of the biblical God is a relative inflection and attestation of the divine *immensitas* and infinity.[509]

Third, throughout the Bible, God's various attributes are characterized as unlimited and utterly perfect. In his knowledge, God comprehends all things, perceiving the hidden affairs of human beings so that his 'thoughts' are beyond all enumeration (Ps. 139:14-18). His understanding is without number or quantity (Ps. 147:5). The depths of his knowledge and wisdom are unsearchable (Rom. 11:33). The love of God is inexorable in preserving believers in the face of all threatening spiritual and physical forces (Rom. 8:37-39), which gestures toward the inexhaustibility and omnipotence of that love. Indeed, the love of God in Christ is a love that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:18-19).

The power of God too is unrestricted. In spite of Sarah's laughter at the thought of having a child in her old age, God's omnipotence – 'is anything too hard for Yahweh?' – will see it done (Gen 18:14). Though Israel should wonder why her cause is seemingly disregarded by God, she must still hope in him because as the all-powerful God he does not faint or tire but rather gives strength to his people (Isa. 40:27-31). In Jeremiah 32 God instructs the prophet to purchase a field in a territory to be overrun by the

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toward the incarnation, but the point is valid when discussing the general contours of divine omnipresence as well.

[508] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, qu. 9, 14, p. 220.

[509] See again Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 9, 21-2, p. 221.

Babylonians, for Yahweh *El Shaddai* will ensure that the land will yet again be used in the future (32:6-15), the Hebrew name *El Shaddai* indicating God's 'formidable power' with which he 'suffices for all things'.[510] Jeremiah continues in prayer: 'Sovereign Yahweh, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you' (32:17). He is the 'great and mighty God, whose name is Yahweh of hosts' (32:18-19), who brought Israel out of Egypt with a 'mighty hand and outstretched arm' (32:20-23). After Jeremiah reiterates the impending conquest of Babylon, God responds by calling himself 'the God of all flesh' for whom nothing is too difficult and by promising in time to restore the land to Israel (32:26-44). In Lucan parlance, even in the case of a virgin birth or the salvation of sinners, 'nothing is impossible with God' (Luke 1:37; 18:27; cf. Eph. 3:20-21).

Regardless of one's initial proclivities on the relationship of the divine attributes to the divine essence – whether one initially considers them to be a 'bundle' of properties constituting the essence of God or (as in the present argument) to be glosses of the whole essence of God – the unbounded plenitude of the various attributes implies the infinity of the essence. Citing a number of the biblical texts invoked here with respect to the perfection of God's attributes, Owen comments, 'This [the infinity of the essence] is a consquence that none can deny who will consider it till he understands the terms of it.'[511] Negatively, 'a property of infinite perfection cannot convene with a finite nature.'[512]

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[510] Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 15, pp. 56-8. The precise origins and meaning of this divine name in Scripture are a matter of debate (or even agnosticism) in contemporary Old Testament scholarship (see, e.g., John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume One: Israel's Gospel* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Milton Keyes: Paternoster, 2003], pp. 243-4).
[511] So Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, chap. 3, pp. 104-5.
[512] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 8, 5, p. 214.

Positively, the unrestricted vigor and sufficiency of each of God's attributes presupposes that God as God is limitless and absolute in all that he is. In sum, the greatness of God wherein he exceeds all creaturely magnitude and measurement, the immensity of God and his transcendence of space, and the radical fullness of each of the attributes of God together indicate that God's being is infinite, a point that contains several implications for divine simplicity.

ii.   *Ad Simplicitatem*

In representing the biblical teaching on God's infinity in a dogmatic frame, it is helpful to clarify that this infinity is not a compilation of measurable magnitude or perfection; rather, in his infinity, God transcends the plane of graded and measurable being altogether.[513] Strictly speaking, then, God is infinite not in extension or quality but just in essence.[514] Moreover, the divine infinity is not to be taken *privative* but rather *negative*. The former pertains to quantity receptive of indefinite addition, while the latter pertains to that which 'naturally neither has nor can have any beginning and end'.[515] The infinity of God is therefore not a vapid indeterminacy or becoming but rather precisely the opposite, and this points to the positive aspect of the attribute. In the words of Leigh, 'although the word be negative, yet we intend by it a positive attribute and perfection….He hath all good things in himself in all fullnesse of perfection, above all

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[513] So Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 19, p. 162.

[514] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 145; Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 4, p. 142.

[515] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 144. Cf. Turretin: *non est tantum* ἀόριστος *indefinita, sed revera* ἄπειρος *infinita* (*Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 8, 3, pp. 213-14).

measure and degrees.'[516] Closely related to God's perfection, God's infinity may be described as his transcendence of limitation, addition, or measurement and as the boundless repletion with which he is God.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are of course determined in personal identity in relation to one another. Yet, this does not entail that the divine persons should be finite, for (at least in a traditional understanding of the Trinity) each of the persons really is the infinite divine essence, and each has his hypostatic demarcation just as a *modus subsistendi* of the essence in relative distinction to the other two modes. This means that the hypostatic demarcation pertains not to the essence but rather to the persons *qua modi* so that the immensity of God remains intact and is not elided by the relative distinctions among the persons.[517] Further, while God is certainly other than the creature, his infinity is a self-referential, prevenient perfection and determinacy in which the Creator-creature

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[516] Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 4, p. 142. This is against Smith, *Oneness and Simplicity of God*, p. 77, where the author suggests that infinity should be viewed in an entirely negative and, indeed, agnostic manner.

[517] As in the discussion of aseity, the attributes predicated of God in his unity (immensity, holiness, love, and the rest) concern the persons as the subsisting God, not as modes of that subsisting. Indeed, to ground the common attributes in the deportment of modes as such is a category mistake. Funded by a classical trinitarian framework, this line of thinking in a sense circumvents the question raised by Barth as to whether the order and distinction of the persons presupposes measure and limitation in God's own being (see *CD*, II/1, pp. 465-8). Barth's reflections on this are developed in an essay by Murray Rae, 'The Spatiality of God', in Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday, eds., *Trinitarian Theology after Barth* (Cambridge: James Clark and Co, 2012), pp. 79-80, 85. Rae seeks to root God's triune self-differentiation in a divine 'proximity' and 'distance' in God that facilitate distinction and communion among the persons. On the one hand, locating the hypostatic distinctions on the modal register alone reframes the question of divine limitation in the Trinity so that it would not impinge on the infinity of the essence. On the other hand, in the judgment of the present author, it is better to set forth the relative determination and communion of the persons without reading prepositions such as 'with' and 'in' (see, e.g., John 1:1; 14:9-11) in a literally spatial manner.

distinction is not delimiting on the side of the Creator.[518] In the creaturely *ordo essendi* in which distinction entails limitation, formal differentiation assumes finitude.[519] In the case of God, however, he contains all perfection in himself *eminenter* so that in his otherness he at the same time surpasses all *genera* and is not determined in relation to creatures.[520] Thus, the contours of Creator-creature distinction in fact underscore that God stands outside the matrix of *esse commune* and contains in himself all goodness finitely imaged in creatures, corroborating God's infinity, in which he is free from all limitation and enjoys fullness of perfection in himself. It is this infinity that implies in at least three ways that God is simple.

First, God's infinity implies that he is wholly in act and is therefore not composed of potentiality and actuality. The profusion of the triune God is duly transposed in the theological descriptor *actus purus*. For the presence of *potentia passiva* would infer the possibility of reduction to actuality and an occurrence of development in tension with God's unbounded perfection. In contrast, in the biblical text, the knowledge of God is entirely comprehensive, the love of God is all-sufficient and without limit, the power of God is adequate to all things in creation and redemption, and similar statements can be made about all of the attributes of God. Under the guidance of the scriptural testimony,

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[518] In Thomas' *ST* (Ia, qu. 7, art. 1, obj. 3, p. 72), a potential objector reasons 'what so is this that it is not another [*aliud*] is finite according to substance. But God is this, and is not another….Therefore, God is not infinite according to substance.' See also Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 86-7.
[519] See Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason*, pp. 36-7.
[520] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 8, 15, p. 216. Cf. Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 19, p. 162-3; Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 4, pp. 142-3. The *eminenter* here signals that God's being includes such perfections in a superior, qualitatively different way (i.e., absolutely and as aspects of his own singular essence).

then, God's infinity conducts us to recognition of the perfect actuality of God, a constituent claim of the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Second, God's infinity implies that he is really identical with each of his attributes and is therefore not composed of substance and accidents. God's essence and attributes are utterly replete with no limit or lack in Holy Scripture so that God is all that he is in a singular perfection and verdure. From the apophatic vantage point, if the perfections were taken to be multiple actual infinites, these would have to be differentiated from one another so that, in the end, each would lack something in the others and prove to be limited and finite. Therefore, the infinity of God entails that he is not composed of really distinct attributes.[521] Multiple infinites would produce a logical problem as well. So Charnock: 'If God be infinite, then he can have no parts in him; if he had, they must be finite or infinite; finite parts can never make up an infinite being….Infinite parts they cannot be, because then every part would be equal to the whole, as infinite as the whole, which is contradictory.'[522] Positively, then, the simplicity of God verifies the infinite fullness of God's essence and attributes and sets forth their excellence of any restriction or participation in a continuum of gradation alongside the perfections of creatures.

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[521] So Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 11, art. 3, corp., p. 111; Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 6, p. 158. One could respond that each of the attributes might be infinite only in respect of its peculiar *ratio*, which might then countenance the presence of other such infinites with their own distinct formal niches. However, this approach would still entail a delimiting of the divine attributes in which one would forego some virtue of another in order to anchor the formal or real distinction between them. Even if they were still taken to be mutually qualifying and enriching – God's holiness is powerful, his power is holy, and so on – such complementarity of the attributes would turn on the postulation of something back of God accounting for his being, which would be inimical to his absoluteness and transcendence of ontic differentiation.
[522] Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:186. Compare Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 7, p. 119.

Further, in his infinite perfection, God has no capacity or need to develop by means of the inhesion of accidental features. In the categories of accidents, *qualitates*, which embrace *habitus* as a species, are *arma substantiarum*, that is, 'instruments by which a substance acts'.[523] *Habitus* in particular is 'a quality introduced into a man, by which he is capable of these operations which by nature alone he is not able to produce'.[524] Yet, in his infinite perfection God stands in no need of such to act and execute his purposes. In fact, as we have seen, the proposal for inclusion of accidents in God on the part of some analytic philosophers appears to emphasize not so much qualities whereby God should be enabled to act but rather just the contingent bearing of certain divine names or attributes ('Creator', 'Lord', 'mercy') that turn on God's free acts.[525] While the emphasis on God's freedom is important, the stricter use of the metaphysical terminology suggests, on the one hand, that in the interest of clarity and precision terms like 'accidents' and 'properties' ought not to be diluted in this manner. On the other hand, it suggests that the real issue at stake is whether one can provide a responsible account of divine action that harmonizes the pure actuality of God and the freedom of God.[526] In sum, then, God's infinity implies that he is each of his perfections subsisting, that these are really identical to one another, and that in the fullness of his being God does not assume accidents.

Third, and finally, God's infinity implies that each of the persons of the Trinity is really identical with God himself (even as they are modally and relatively distinct from one another), and that the persons do not join together to compose God. The fullness of

[523] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 4, p. 258.
[524] Keckermann, *Systema Logica*, lib. 1, cap. 9, p. 588.
[525] See again Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 231-40.
[526] Such an account is ventured in the next chapter.

deity is in the Son (Col. 2:9), and, in light of the equality of the Father, Son, and Spirit, is

in all three of the persons. In its infinite perfection, that fullness is an irreducible whole

that cannot be apportioned as though the Father, Son, and Spirit should occupy different

segments of God's being. Indeed, as a matter of logical consistency, they cannot be three

distinct *entia* comprising an infinite composite. Instead, the three persons are three

relatively distinct modes of subsisting of the infinite divine essence, and they are called

infinite – and, indeed, holy, righteous, omnipotent, and so on – *ousiōdōs*, not

hypostatikōs, *in ratione essentiae*, not *in ratione modi*.

iii.   Conclusion

In this section on divine infinity in relation to divine simplicity, scriptural

teaching on the greatness of God, the immensity of God, and the perfection of God's

attributes generated a dogmatic distillation of God's infinity as his essential

transcendence of limitation, addition, or measurement and as the boundless repletion with

which he is God. From here, the implications of divine infinity for divine simplicity were

drawn out in terms of the pure actuality of God, the identity of God with each of his

perfections (and the real identity of these with one another), and the real identity of each

of the persons of the Trinity with God himself. In the wake of the constructive argument,

there is occasion to point up once more that the doctrine of divine simplicity does not

necessarily fall prey to the objections found in modern systematics and analytic

philosophy. First, as the field of God's revelatory action, the economy of salvation

narrated in Scripture discloses God's immensity and infinity and directs us to his

simplicity. This represents a conscious break with Hellenistic sensibilities about infinity.[527] Against Aristotle's belief that infinity entails quantitative parts, indefiniteness, and imperfection, Thomas writes, 'But, because some [ancient philosophers] have erred about the nature of the first principle, it has followed that they err about the infinity of it. For, because they put the first principle as matter, consequently they have attributed to the first principle a material infinity.'[528] Polanus and others then make a firm distinction between infinity taken *privative* and infinity taken *negative*, with only the latter being applicable to God and to God alone.

Second, the economic shape of the discussion here also precludes a bifurcation of God's action *pro nobis* and God's being *in se*. For the fullness and vigor with which the former encounters us in redemptive history compels us to acknowledge the infinite perfection of God's immanent life and thus the simplicity of his being. Accordingly, far from robbing God of his immanent richness, divine simplicity is but an inferential confirmation of that richness. Third, divine simplicity, with its characterization of God as *actus purus*, does not entail an inertia in God; instead, it is an attempt to confirm the plenitude of all that God is. Fourth, and finally, because the infinite perfection of God suggests certain parameters for what can and cannot be said about the distinctions among the persons of the Trinity, it suggests also that simplicity may not be the liability that it is sometimes thought to be with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, and this will receive further treatment in the next chapter. Presently, however, this chapter concludes with an exposition of the relationship between *creatio ex nihilo* and divine simplicity.

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[527] This move is noted by Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, p. 215 and discussed in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:329-31.
[528] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 7, art. 1, corp., p. 72.

C. **'In the beginning, God created':** *Creatio ex Nihilo* **and Divine Simplicity**

The biblical teaching on the act of creation, taken up in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, is another scriptural signpost of God's simplicity. Here pertinent Old and New Testament passages are examined with an eye to the exegetical basis for the critical prepositional phrase *ex nihilo* and, ultimately, with an eye to the manner in which *creatio ex nihilo* impels certain claims within a dogmatic account of divine simplicity.

i. **Biblical Teaching**

There are many texts in Scripture that speak of God's creative action, and these do so through the use of diverse verbs and metaphors.[529] The intent here is neither to repudiate this diversity nor to deny that God's creative action encompasses his shaping of that which already exists. Rather, the intent is to point up that those texts that touch upon the absolute origin of created reality envision it coming into being *ex nihilo* and by the word of God alone.[530] Holy Scripture opens with the announcement that 'in the

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[529] These are helpfully catalogued in Terence E. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), pp. 1-3.

[530] Such intratextual ramification of different moments in the work of creation relativizes the role of an extrabiblical *regula fidei* (amplified recently in Paul Gavrilyuk, 'Creation in Early Christian Polemical Literature: Irenaeus against the Gnostics and Athanasius against the Arians', *Modern Theology* 29 [2013], pp. 22-32) in arriving at the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Those texts describing God's provision of order for already-existing beings and those describing God's initial origination of all things without appeal to pre-existing material and by God's own efficacious word simply occupy different strata of biblical teaching on God's creative work and therefore do not stand in contradiction to one another. Thus, they do not require an external magisterial pronouncement from the theological (or philosophical) tradition in order to yield the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In short, the Bible offers the reader a schematic of its own theological teaching on

beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 1:1). The following verse adds, 'Now the earth was a wasteland and an emptiness, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters' (1:2). Comparing Psalm 104 and Genesis 1 in a historical-critical light, Jon Levenson maintains that the Genesis account of creation musters no opposition to the primordiality of the deep in 1:2, 6-10.[531] Thus, Levenson argues, the point of creation in the Old Testament is not that God made all things *ex nihilo* but rather, in line with the *Chaoskampf* theme in *Enuma Elish*, 'the establishment of a benevolent and life-sustaining order, founded upon the demonstrated authority of the God who is triumphant over all rivals'.[532] This postulate of something uncreated and other than God himself in Genesis 1 (and other biblical pericopae) presents an opportunity to elucidate exegetical grounds for *creatio ex nihilo*.

First, unlike other ancient Near Eastern accounts, Genesis 1 omits and implicitly eschews theogony, a point recognized by Levenson himself.[533] 'That ancient cosmogonies characteristically attributed the origins of the creator-god to some pre-existing matter (usually primeval waters) makes the absence of such description in

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creation, even as a summary *regula fidei* helps to orient the reader of the Bible and to hasten right interpretation.

[531] Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 4-5, 65, 68. For other texts adduced in support of the so-called *Chaoskampf* proposal, see Psalm 74:12-17; 77:16-20; 89:9-10; Isa. 51:9. Compare also 2 Pet. 3:5.

[532] Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, p. 47. Against a thoroughgoing *Chaoskampf* reading of creation in the Old Testament, see Dennis J. McCarthy, '"Creation" Motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry', in Bernard W. Anderson (ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament*, Issues in Religion and Theology 6 (London: SPCK; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 74-89; David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

[533] Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, p. 5.

Genesis distinctive.'[534] Goldingay adds, 'The beginning the First Testament relates is the

beginning of God's work in the world. If it could give an account of God's own

beginning, God as the First Testament understands God would surely cease to be God (cf.

Ps 90:2).'[535] Accordingly, second, God alone is the subject of his creative work in 1:1. If

the plural forms in 1:26 do gesture toward the presence of an angelic entourage – and this

is not an uncontested reading[536] – the angels obviously do not appear in 1:1 executing the

foundational creative act.

Third, there are four main options for relating verse 1 to verse 2 and for relating

these to the rest of the chapter. Gordon Wenham concisely delineates them:

> 1. V 1 is a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in v 2: 'In the
> beginning when God created…,the earth was without form….'
> 2. V 1 is a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in v 3 (v 2 is a
> parenthetic comment). 'In the beginning when God created…(now the earth was
> formless) God said….'
> 3. V 1 is a main clause, summarizing all the events described in vv 2-31. It is a
> title to the chapter as a whole, and could be rendered 'In the beginning God was
> the creator of heaven and earth.' What being the creator of heaven and earth
> means is then explained in more detail in vv 2-31.
> 4. V 1 is a main clause describing the first act of creation. Vv 2 and 3 describe
> subsequent phases of God's creative activity.[537]

According to Wenham,

> most modern commentators agree that v 1 is an independent main clause to be
> translated 'In the beginning God created….' However, within this consensus
> there is still dispute as to the relationship between v 1 and vv 2-3. The majority…
> adopt the view that Gen 1:1 is essentially a title to what follows….On this view,
> vv 2-30 expound what is meant by the verb 'create' in v 1. Creation is a matter of

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[534] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, p. 139.

[535] Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 44.

[536] For the interpretive options with brief assessment, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 132-4; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), pp. 160-3.

[537] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), p. 11.

organizing pre-existing chaos. The origin of the chaos is left undiscussed, and given the background of oriental mythology, it may be presumed to be eternal.[538]

However, Wenham asks, 'How can God be said to create the earth (v 1), if the earth pre-existed his creative activity (v 2)?' If 1:2 and the rest of the chapter recount the formation and ordering of eternal chaos, then the final form of the text is haunted by a fundamental self-contradiction. In view of the theological coherence of Scripture, this is a significant argument for rejecting the view that God merely structures an eternal material reality in Genesis 1.[539] In other words, 'v. I stands with good reason before v. 2!'[540] Thus, the narrative flows in this way: 'v 1: first creative act; v 2: consequence of v 1; v 3: first creative word'.[541] In addition, the Masoretic pointing and the ancient versions present the passage according to the fourth option listed above.[542]

Such arguments duly lead a number of Old Testament scholars to hold that God creates all of reality – including all material reality – in Genesis 1 in accordance with the traditional doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in Christian theology. The text does not explicitly tell us that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, and there is an element of truth in Claus

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[538] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 12-13.

[539] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 13.

[540] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., trans. John H. Marks, Old Testament Library (London: SCM; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), p. 51. Even if one inclines to sifting the compositional background of the text, Gerhard F. Hasel, 'The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology', *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974), pp. 81-102, for example, demonstrates that Genesis 1 does not naively imbibe the statements of other creation accounts but rather subverts them. Compare also Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 13.

[541] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 13.

[542] Wenham views this as 'the greatest argument in its favor since: those closest in time to the composition of Gen 1 may be presumed to be best informed about its meaning' (*Genesis 1-15*, p. 13).

Westermann's quip that one 'can teach *creatio ex nihilo*; but one cannot narrate it.'[543]

Nevertheless, the Genesis account does implicitly convey the doctrine. As Walter

Brueggemann writes, 'Though [the teaching of *creatio ex nihilo*] goes beyond the

statement of our verses, it likely understands the intent of the poem.'[544] In view of the

full scope of the chapter (and his own source-critical conclusions), Eichrodt judges,

> A relative interpretation of the expression [בְּרֵאשִׁית] would place an emphasis on
> the autonomy of the chaotic matter at the beginning of creation contrary to the
> whole concern of this creation story. The narrator is moved to reflection not by
> that which preceded the divine creation but by the fact that nothing but the
> autonomous decree of the transcendent God determined the form of creation.
> That the *creatio ex nihilo* thereby enters the picture is incontestable.[545]

Fourth, that creation does occur by divine fiat (יְהִי) is made explicit at various

points in the narrative (1:3, 6, 14). This is, as Moberly remarks, 'a pronouncement that,

in terms of contemporary linguistic theory, is performative, that is, it brings about that of

which it speaks'.[546] God's creative work is not always accomplished by his word alone

but sometimes though creaturely means (1:11-12). However, this mode of creative action

(the use of means) presupposes that God has already created the landscape of the world

by his word alone. Fifth, and finally, all of this drives home for us the Creator-creature

distinction: 'The idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical

essential distinction between Creator and creature; it is not somehow an overflow or

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[543] Claus Westermann, *Genesis: An Introduction*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 46.
[544] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982). This is not necessarily to endorse Brueggemann's judgment about the literary genre of the text. Compare William R. Lane, 'The Initiation of Creation', *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963), p. 73; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 49; Arnold, *Genesis*, pp. 35-6.
[545] Walther Eichrodt, 'In the Beginning: A Contribution to the Interpretation of the First Word of the Bible', in Anderson (ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament*, p. 72.
[546] R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, Old Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 44.

reflection of his being, i.e., of his divine nature, but is rather a product of his personal will.'[547]

Beyond the teaching in Genesis 1 that God is the Creator of all, including all material reality, with its implicit affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo*, several other Old Testament texts conduct us toward this doctrine. In a sweeping rendition of Yahweh's sovereignty, the Psalmist declares, 'By the word of Yahweh, the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their host' (33:6). The next verse speaks of God 'gathering the waters like a heap' and 'putting the deep in a storehouse' (33:7). Yet the Psalmist then exhorts the inhabitants of the earth to tremble 'because he [Yahweh] spoke and then it was; he commanded and then it stood' (33:8-9). While 33:7 leaves open whether the deep was created by God, 33:8-9 makes clear that the earth, of which the deep is a part, was in fact created by the powerful speech of God. Similarly, in Psalm 148 the Psalmist calls upon the angels, the heavens, and the waters above the heavens to praise the name of Yahweh and gives the basis of the call to praise: 'For he [Yahweh] commanded and they were created' (148:5). Once more, then, the full scope of creaturely reality, including the waters marked off by God in Genesis 1:6-8, is placed under the creative fiat of God. In the book of Proverbs, the discourse of wisdom personified in 8:12-36 supplies further testimony to God's creation of all things and, implicitly, to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Wisdom stands at the beginning of Yahweh's work prior to the beginning of the earth (8:23). She precedes the deep and the springs of water (8:24) and the rest of

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[547] von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 51-2. Of course, the 'reflection' terminology must be weighed carefully here. Creation is certainly not an inexorable 'overflow of [God's] being', but it does in finite and various ways show forth his perfection.

creation too (8:25-28). God both originates the sea and orders and demarcates it (8:28-

29).[548] Thus, Goldingay reasons,

> In seeing water as the primordial element in the forming of the world, Proverbs
> corresponds to Genesis and to *Enuma Elish*, and also to some Egyptian and Greek
> understandings. It then goes behind the existence of deep, springs, and water to a
> time when there were none of these….It thinks back to a time when there was no
> matter out of which the world might be formed, and declares that God's being
> antedates that – rather than postdating it, like that of the Babylonian gods.[549]

Markus Bockmuehl's conclusion is therefore apropos: 'The meaning and substance of the

doctrine [*creatio ex nihilo*], though not the terminology, is firmly rooted in scripture and

pre-Christian Jewish literature.'[550]

Turning to the New Testament, we read in John 1, which harkens back to Genesis

1 and perhaps to Proverbs 8 also, that 'all things were made through him [the Logos], and

without him not even one thing was made which has been made' (1:3).[551] With the

Greek *panta* ('all things') fronted for emphasis in the first clause of verse 3 and the

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[548] So Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p.
282; Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*, New International
Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 412.
[549] Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 46-7.
[550] Markus Bockmuehl, '*Creatio ex Nihilo* in Palestinian Judaism and Early Christianity',
Scottish Journal of Theology 65 (2012), p. 270. Gunton is slightly more reserved but
says, 'The grounds for later doctrines of creation are undoubtedly present, particularly in
the expressions of the freedom and sovereignty of God which are everywhere to be
found. They are to be found above all in, first, the way in which the language of myth is
transformed in order to remove any suggestion that this God, unlike the gods of other
cultures, was in any way limited by any other reality' (*The Triune Creator: A Historical
and Systematic Study* [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998], p. 20).
[551] There is some debate over whether the relative clause *ho gegonen* ('which has been
made') at the end of verse 3 belongs with what precedes it in verse 3 (as in the rendering
above) or with what follows it in verse 4 ('that which has been made in him was life…').
For the two different views, see, e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John
I-XII: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 1, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday,
1966), p. 6; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John, Volume 1:
Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1-4* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), pp. 239-
40. Ultimately, the point made here does not hang on one's decision about this issue.

negative reiteration of the point in the second clause, John stresses the absoluteness of the extent of God's creative action through his Word.[552] A number of texts in the New Testament likewise teach that God is the Creator of all things other than himself (Acts 17:24; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Rev. 4:11). In Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 there is a more overt attestation of *creatio ex nihilo*. In expounding the dynamics of law and promise in relation to the life of Abraham, the apostle Paul writes that Abraham believed the God 'who gives life to the dead and calls things not being as things being' (*ta mē onta hōs onta*) (Rom. 4:17). Abraham trusted the promise of God that he should become the father of many nations despite his old age and Sarah's barrenness (4:18-22), and some commentators hold that the life-giving and creative power of God in 4:17 is applicable to only the plight and blessing of Abraham and Sarah in 4:18-22.[553] However, it seems that the statement in 4:17 is meant to convey the broader forcefulness of God's power in order to confirm its adequacy to the difficult situation of Abraham and Sarah.[554]

In Hebrews 11, the commendation of faith via an enumeration of the great saints of the past begins with an act of trust and knowledge common to all the people of God: 'By faith we understand the ages to have been created by the word of God, so that what is seen has come from what is not seen' (11:3). Insofar as that which is seen includes matter, this text implicitly excludes creation out of pre-existing matter. Yet, some reason,

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[552] So Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 36.
[553] E.g., Joseph Fitymyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 386. See also Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p. 27.
[554] Compare N. T. Wright, 'Romans', in vol. 10 of Leander Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 497-9.

one cannot say that 'invisibility is non-existence.'[555] In other words, the invisibility of

the source of creation does not *per se* entail *creatio ex nihilo*. In light of a parallelism

observed between the two clauses of 11:3, it is posited that the unseen in 11:3b is the

word of God from 11:3a.[556] There is of course nothing objectionable in this exegetical

line, but it should not be pitted against the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In fact, the two

dovetail quite well: creation occurs *ex nihilo* (*mē ek phainomenōn*) but also *per verbum*

Dei (*rhēmati theou*).[557] As in the Old Testament teaching, 'the creative word of God has

performative power in calling forth and ordering the visible universe.'[558] With this

biblical material in mind, we approach the task of explicating the relationship between

creatio ex nihilo and the doctrine of divine simplicity.

ii.   *Ad Simplicitatem*

In view of the relevant biblical texts, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is the

teaching that, according to his free determination to originate a reality other than himself,

God has created the universe from nothing, calling into being all that exists by his own

powerful word alone. As Barth writes,

> The importance of this theologoumenon [*creatio ex nihilo*] for the whole doctrine
> of creation is unmistakeable. If the Christian doctrine of creation is to be
> precisely defined over against the two views which stand opposed to it, namely,
> the doctrine of the world as a part or emanation of the divine being (i.e., monism)
> and the doctrine of the world as an independent entity eternally co-existing with

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[555] Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 474.
[556] Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 474; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New
Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 401-2.
[557] See, for example, the exegesis of Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp.
113-14.
[558] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 331.

God (i.e., dualism), then the concept of divine creation must be given this sharp formulation.[559]

Yet, the phrase *ex nihilo* still invites some clarification. First, the *nihil* is not to be taken positively as though 'nothing' were a material or efficient cause but rather negatively as there was not something upon which God drew to fashion the world. The preposition *ex* introduces only a *terminus a quo* or, indeed, merely an *ordo creationis* in which creation comes into being 'not so much *ex nihilo* as *post nihilum*'. In this way, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not an illogical violation of the axiom *ex nihilo nihil fit* but merely a compression of the claim that something (created, finite reality in its material and immaterial components) was not and then, by divine fiat, came to be.[560]

Second, this parsing of the *nihil* corroborates that God does not delimit himself in a zero-sum game with other entities vying for allotments of a common ontological fund. The *nihil* is not an actual posit as though it were a primordial metaphysical principle or as though God should have brought it into being as the eventual site of the universe in order to '[make] room for his creation by withdrawing his presence'.[561] Hence God is not moored within the creaturely *ordo essendi* with its circumscriptive categories; instead, he remains fully himself without restriction or alteration in creating the world and is thus

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[559] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, pp. 154-5.

[560] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 1, 5, p. 475. See also John Webster, '"Love is also a lover of life": *Creatio ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness', *Modern Theology* 29 (2013), p. 163: 'The temptation is to turn the grammatical substantive "nothing" into a metaphysical substance. But "nothing" is not some sort of inchoate stuff to which the act of creation gives form….Nothing is pure negation, *nihil negativum*.' Compare also Oliphint: 'before God created, there was not even nothing; there was God and only God' (*God with Us*, p. 13).

[561] Moltmann, *God and Creation*, p. 87. Moltmann explicitly says that the 'nothing' is neither divine nor created (*God and Creation*, p. 88). Pannenberg calls this proposal a 'materially unfounded mystification of the subject' (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], pp. 14-15).

able to be genuinely present to and in it.[562] Finally, the scope of *creatio ex nihilo* thus

extends to all reality that is other than God himself. Whatever is that is not God has been

either wrought *ex nihilo* (or *post nihilum*) or fashioned from that which was wrought *ex

nihilo*. The singularity of God *qua Deus* and *qua Creator* in Holy Scripture and the

sweeping description of the creative work of God together impel this assertion. This

applies to features of reality as yet undiscovered in the days of the biblical authors and

only recently identified in the natural sciences. That it should apply even to so-called

'abstract objects' that likewise may never have garnered serious reflection on the part of

the biblical authors is more contested in present theological debate, but it will be asserted

here in the delineation of several ways in which *creatio ex nihilo* implies that God is

simple.[563]

    First, *creatio ex nihilo* entails that God is *actus purus* and is therefore not

composed of potentiality and actuality. To act or produce something with no pre-existing

material from which to draw or upon which to act requires of God an infinite power and

efficacy and thus an *actus* – for capacity and efficacy in action turn upon magnitude of

essential *actus* – that cannot (and need not) be developed or enhanced. It is not that

God's being might include an amalgam of potentiality and actuality as long as the

actuality is adequate to the act of creation. For the question of adequacy to *creatio ex

nihilo* itself stipulates that God must be pure act, precluding such an amalgam.[564] For this

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[562] Compare Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 135.
[563] Compare Morris and Menzel, 'Absolute Creation', p. 354; Leftow, 'Is God an Abstract Object?', pp. 582-4.
[564] So Thomas (*ST*, Ia, qu. 45, art. 5, ad 3, p. 470): 'the power of making is considered not only from the substance of the thing made but also from the mode of making. Therefore, although to create some finite effect does not demonstrate infinite power, nevertheless, to create it from nothing demonstrates infinite power.'

act requires a *potentia infinita* and so an *actus infinitus* 'exhausting the infinite distance between nothing and something'.[565] Again, the act of creation assumes an infinite power and *actus* both in that it is accomplished by 'beck and word alone' (*solo nutu & verbo*) and in that by it an infinite distance between *ens* and *nihil* is 'taken up' (*tolli*). For *ens* and *nihil* are opposed 'immediately and contradictorily'.[566] Indeed, to sharpen the description, there is in fact no distance (strictly speaking) between two real extremes to be crossed here at all: *nulla proportio est…non entis et ens*.[567] In other words, there is no commonality or traversable interval between *non ens* and *ens* and therefore *creatio ex nihilo* can be achieved only by an infinite efficacy, which belongs to God alone as *actus purus*. Already this study has contended that, as *actus purus*, God does not act by an *actio* other than or supplementary to himself, and it is reiterated again here. As Weinandy explains, '[T]he act of creation itself demands that God act by no other act than the pure act that he is as *ipsum esse* for no other act is capable of such a singular effect.'[568] It is apposite to conclude, then, that the act of creation requires an *actus purus* and that this *actus* is God himself considered relatively or with respect to creation.

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[565] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 9, 6, p. 119.

[566] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 2, 5, p. 478. Turretin adds that this *distantia* is not *distantia perfectionis* wherein God is infinitely distant from his creatures but rather *distantia negativa & contradictionis* wherein even *ens finitum* too is infinitely distant from *non ens*.

[567] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 45, art. 5, ad 3, p. 470.

[568] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, pp. 132-3. This coheres with previous statements on God's aseity and infinity militating against an objective *essentia-operatio* distinction in God. For God's plenitude and perfection obviate any need for him to acquire or manufacture some new motion whereby he might accomplish his will. Instead, the *operatio ad extra* (though not the *opera ad extra*) is the *essentia* bearing on created objects. Compare Alsted: 'in created beings essence is limited, and so is necessarily really distinguished from operation. But in uncreated being essence is unlimited and so perfect, that in itself it contains all its own effects, without any composition of itself' (*Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 16, p. 148). This denial of God acting by a

Second, *creatio ex nihilo* implies that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* and is therefore not composed of essence and existence. He himself is the source and basis of all that exists without deferring to or commandeering anything else in order to grant being to creatures. By contrast, if God were objectively distinct from his existence as *ens* from *principium entis*, then he would be *ens per participationem*. So Thomas: 'Nothing of which essence is not its own existence [*esse*] is by its own essence but by participation of something, namely of existence itself [*ipsius esse*].'[569] If God were objectively distinct from his own existence, he would not retain his ultimacy and ontic definitiveness revealed in the work of creation but would yield that ultimacy to an *esse* back of God, a true absolute by which even God himself would be relativized.

To resist such inferences and to argue the identity of God and his own *esse* is not reducible to an attempt merely to find a suitable explanation and legitimization of the world or human existence; rather, at stake here is fidelity to the biblical teaching of *creatio ex nihilo*, in which God himself is the origin of all. At stake here is also the particularity of God. For only by maintaining the absoluteness of God can one maintain that he is utterly unique and not to be subsumed under categories shared by creatures. Otherwise, God and the creature would both be situated under an *esse commune*, and this would not only elide the Creator-creature distinction and particularity of God but would

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augmentative *actio* is but one modulation of the broader denial of God acting in creation by any kind of instrument (on which, see Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 45, art. 5, pp. 469-70; Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici*, cap. 37, pp. 338-41; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 2, 6-7, pp. 478-9; Webster, '"Love is also a lover of life"', p. 161). God alone is infinite and omnipotent, and therefore he alone is adequate to the act of *creatio ex nihilo*, which entails that creation is an immediate divine act without any instrumental causation. This is of course to say nothing of the problem of an instrumental cause in creation having to be placed *per impossibile* in the space between God and created reality.

[569] Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib.1, cap. 22, pp. 68-9.

also rob God of the power to create *ex nihilo*. If God's essence and God's existence were objectively distinct, and if God's *esse* were thus but another instance of *esse commune*, then there would be not just a *principium entis* (*esse*) back of God but also a creator back of God. For whatever a thing has that is other than its essence is either *ab essentia* or *ab alio extrinseco*. But *esse* cannot be *ab essentia* on pain of positing self-causation, which leaves only the option that God's *esse* should be *ab alio*,[570] and such a claim would be to repudiate the scriptural teaching on creation in which God in his ultimacy is the origin of all reality. One could surmise that perhaps God and God's existence are objectively distinct from one another and yet inseparable, not by the agency of another, but by necessity (because it just is so). However, this approach would elevate modality to a position of metaphysical primordiality instead of framing it within the context of ontological structure or, better, within an account of the God the Creator who is *a se* and is the origin of all that exists.[571] This approach would also render God an epiphenomenon of blind coincidence and would also place God in a network of being shared by creatures at the expense of his qualitative uniqueness, particularity, and otherness. In sum, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* requires the claim that God's essence (or God himself) and God's existence are one and the same. That God is *ipsum esse subsistens* secures that he is truly the one from whom and through whom and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36), the absolute origin and norm of reality back of whom nothing lies.

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[570] So Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4, corp., p. 42; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 142.

[571] That is, modality itself is not ultimate. Whether something is necessary or contingent trades on whether its essence is other than its existence or whether it (in the case of God, 'he') is *ipsum esse subsistens*.

Third, the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* implies that God is really identical with each of his attributes, which are *schemata ipsius Dei*, and that he is therefore not composed of his various attributes or of substance and accidents. The divine perfections are God himself under diverse aspects, for, in the divine act of creation in Scripture, God is the cause of all that is other than himself. Therefore, if the perfections were other than God himself, God would cause or create his own nature (and thus himself), which is logically untenable and subversive of the freedom of God in the work of creation.[572] Yet, to move in the opposite direction and to suggest that God's perfections are other than himself but still uncreated is to posit the sort of *tertium quid* between the uncreated God and created things that is precluded by *creatio ex nihilo*.

This judgment about the exclusion of uncreated things other than God himself is not uncontested, and, though the theological rationale for the identity of God and his attributes has already been laid out here, it may be helpful to face some of the philosophical resistance at this point in order to verify the doctrine of divine simplicity and to illustrate its potential significance to theology's station as *regina scientiarum*. According to Wolterstorff, the elimination of uncreated things other than God himself is a misinterpretation of *creatio ex nihilo*. He argues that the question of whether the divine perfections – or, to broaden the terminology, universals – are uncreated or created is 'absolutely irrelevant' to the Christian view of creation. To Wolterstorff, the fact that universals are 'never mentioned' in the biblical account of creation, and the fact that the doctrine of creation in biblical thought is designed not to deliver a 'theoretical ontology'

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[572] Cf. Leftow, 'Is God an Abstract Object?', p. 588; Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), pp. 175-6.

but to incite trust and praise of God, suggests that universals are not enclosed within God's creative action.[573]

However, in response to Wolterstorff, three things may be said. First, universals need not be explicitly 'mentioned' in Scripture in order to be implicated in the act of creation. Second, the theological meaning of biblical teaching is not reducible to its practical effects, even its clearly intended practical effects. In other words, *creatio ex nihilo* might implicitly include universals even if this is not overtly brought to bear in appeals to creation as an encouragement toward faith in the Creator. In fact, an independent company of universals may not be religiously neutral in the end. When Wolterstorff writes that 'nothing is unique in that it falls outside this fundamental structure of reality [a structure of abstract predicables being exemplified by various entities, including God],'[574] the attenuation of God's singularity, aseity, and ultimacy is palpable. Thus, placing such universals at the apex of a comprehensive theological lattice has consequences for faith and worship. Third, because Holy Scripture never intimates that God might have eternal co-existents, and because its didactic momentum, in its disdain for theogony, its sweeping account of creation, and its insistence on Yahweh's ultimacy, travels in the opposite direction, it becomes a matter of speculation

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[573] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *On Universals: An Essay in Ontology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 293-6. Similarly, Peter van Inwagen ('God and Other Uncreated Objects', in Kevin Timpe [ed.], *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy [London and New York: Routledge, 2009], p. 19) makes the claim that it is 'no business of [theology]' to analyze whether God is the Creator of abstact objects. In his judgment, the task should be left to the discipline of philosophy alone.
[574] Wolterstorff, *On Universals*, p. 299.

to posit the existence of uncreated, independent universals.[575] In this way, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the concomitant Creator-creature distinction entail that there is no intermediate ontological position between God himself and created things, which entailment then motivates a more theologically attuned account of universals or so-called 'abstract objects'.

While Plantinga and Wolterstorff conclude that there is a conglomerate of objective universals that are neither God himself nor things created by God, Morris and Menzel propose that universals, even God's own perfections, are created by God. Copan and Craig duly characterize and reject the former approach as an expression of Platonism, which is inconsistent with the Christian doctrines of divine aseity and *creatio ex nihilo*, and they observe that the latter is riddled with a vicious circularity in which God is thought to create himself. Yet, in repudiating a middle ground between God and created being, Copan and Craig still wish to avoid the doctrine of divine simplicity and aver that either a 'fictionalist' or 'conceptualist' account of universals will prove a sufficient way forward.[576] However, while they rightly reject Platonism about separate universals, Copan and Craig still posit properties in God that are neither God himself nor things created by God. By countenancing such properties, on which God must depend in order to be what he is, they still undermine God's aseity and proffer an iteration of that middle

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[575] Wolterstorff's biblicism (i.e., his claim that something is biblical only if it is present in the Bible *kata lexin*) is problematic, but this note about resisting speculation is not a matter of biblicism. For it does not assume that would-be eternal co-existents must be explicitly identified in Scripture but only at least inferentially discernible from the biblical text, or perhaps at least not in contradiction to the theological import and trajectory of the text. Positively, this concern is rooted in the testimony that actually is supplied in Scripture, which conveys that God alone is uncreated and sovereign over all else.

[576] Copan and Craig, *Creation out of Nothing*, pp. 177-95.

ground between Creator and creature that is contrary to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In their proposal, while God would not exemplify and depend upon abstract universals, he would nevertheless depend upon really distinct properties that would undergird and authenticate what he is as God and would lie in that illusory field between God himself and that which God has made.   Accordingly, it is not just the tacit Platonist who ought to consider the advantages of the doctrine of divine simplicity but also those who prefer a more modest account of universals.[577]

With the logical move from *creatio ex nihilo* to God's identity with his own perfections in hand, there emerges an account of universals such as wisdom, goodness, and so on in which these are objectively present not *ante res* but only *in rebus* and are only *post res* abstracted and isolated as universals by the human mind. *Extra mentem*, such exist only *in rebus*, while *in mente* they may exist *extra res*. Separate universals, then, are not self-existent, crowning features of an overarching ontological system that precedes and envelops God and creatures alike but are, rather, *entia rationis cum fundamento in rebus*, derived from their objective formal similitude in created things by human abstractive reasoning. In other words, they do not fall outside the scope of God's creative action but rather are concreated with particular creaturely substances and then rationally prescinded in their universality or applicability to the many by one such species of creaturely substances – human beings.[578] The ground of the genuine similitude underlying this universality, about which Wolterstorff is skeptical on such a reading of

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[577] *Pace* Copan and Craig's criticism of Leftow (*Creation out of Nothing*, p. 177n12). Copan and Craig mention the possibility of an Aristotelian view of essence and universals (pp. 178, 185), but they do not recognize that in such a view essence is still a *principium* on which a thing depends.
[578] On this, see Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 16, pp. 144-6.

universals,[579] lies in the divine intellect. God knows himself as imitable or participable in

various ways by creatures and, in this knowledge of his own imitability, knows various

ideas which are paradigmatic of creaturely forms and according to which he produces his

creatures.[580] These ideas are the exemplar causes or types of creaturely forms, and, as

such, they both stabilize and distinguish, specifically unify and differentiate those forms

as they are found in created things. The doctrine of divine ideas therefore secures the

commonality or sameness of the nature governing created things in a single species by

tracing this back to God's own determinate act of understanding that is prior to all created

being.[581]

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[579] Wolterstorff, *On Universals*, pp. 142, 146.

[580] At this point, Wolterstorff misunderstands the inner logic of the doctrine of divine
ideas present in Thomas and a number of Reformed orthodox authors. He claims that the
doctrine implies that 'humanity' or 'squareness', for example, must be identical to the
divine essence. But the ideas taken objectively or *ad creaturas* (rather than originally
and as to the essence itself) are not identical to the divine essence in Thomistic thought.
Nor are they, for that reason, autonomous exemplars consulted by God to negotiate
different participations of himself in the created order. Rather, they are known by God
precisely as God knows, not only himself as imitable, but also, in his singular intuitive act
of understanding himself and his own power, the ways or species in which he may be
imitated. Further, according to Thomas and his philosophical sympathizers in Reformed
orthodoxy, matter (of which 'squareness' would be a configuration) is not a thing in its
own right and is not known in its own right apart from (intelligible) form (Thomas, *ST*,
Ia, qu. 15, art. 3, ad 3, p. 204; qu. 44, art. 2, ad 3, p. 458; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap.
27, pp. 214-15). Yet, insofar as matter is created by God, it points back to some
primordial divine conception of it, though not without its union with form in a composite
(so Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 320-3). Thus, we might say,
just as God knows evil *per oppositum* in knowing himself as good (e.g., Alsted,
Theologia Naturalis, pars 1, cap. 10, p. 91), he knows matter *per oppositum* in knowing
himself as spiritual. For more on the divine ideas in Thomas' thought, see Gregory T.
Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic
University of America Press, 2008).

[581] It should be noted that the multiplicity of the divine ideas is not in conflict with God's
simplicity. For the multiplicity does not respect the essence by which God knows the
forms but rather only the forms known and in relation to possible creaturely instantiation.
As Thomas has it, the ideas are multiplied only *secundum respectum ad res* (*ST*, Ia, qu.
44, art. 3, corp., p. 460). So also Mastricht: 'Hence an idea, as it is considered absolutely

In maintaining that *creatio ex nihilo* disavows any *tertium quid* between God himself and created things, and that this requires us to identify God's perfections or attributes with God himself in accord with the doctrine of divine simplicity, it must be emphasized that this is not to compromise the concreteness of God. Once again, we do not grant to 'abstract properties' an ontological or epistemological ultimacy and then concede God to be an 'abstract object'. Rather, we behold God in Holy Scripture as the God who is personal and is characterized adjectivally as wise, just, and so on – and the scholastics point out that such adjectival characterization underscores that God is not abstract but *subsistens*[582] – and then, on account of the scriptural portrayal of *creatio ex nihilo* and the implication that there is no eternal quality such as wisdom or justice other than God himself, we amend our conception of wisdom, justice, and the rest so that these in their primordiality are neither autonomous abstracts above God nor qualities inhering in God but rather God himself under various aspects. God is neither *realiter* nor *rationaliter* conformed to supposed *extra mentem* separate univerals. The exact opposite is the case: would-be abstract universals thought to be instantiated as divine attributes are recognized in fact to be sundry schematizations of the abundant triune God whose revelation in Scripture legislates the theological content of those attributes.[583] Even if

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in God, is merely one, because it is the essence of himself; but as far as it connotes various respects toward creatures, it is multiple' (*Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 13, 9, p. 145). That is, the ideas are singular and simple as to origin and intelligible means of derivation even as they are multiple objectively and *ad creaturas*.

[582] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 32, art. 2, corp., p. 351; Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 10; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 141.

[583] From here, with the aid of the doctrine of divine ideas, one may then move from God's love, for example, to *caritas communis*, the love shared by and applied to the many in the creaturely register. Of course, not all universals found in creatures are traceable to divine attributes; some are simply divine ideas taken relatively and objectively and have no analogical precedent in God himself.

this identification incites a cognitive disorientation in a significant cross-section of contemporary philosophical theology, it is a necessary theological judgment that corroborates and amplifies the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the ultimacy of the triune Creator, sidestepping the theologically problematic *tertium quid* between God and created being and alleviating the subordination of God to a generic ontological structure.

iii.   Conclusion

In this section, we have considered the scriptural testimony to the work of God in creating all things *ex nihilo* or *post nihilum*, marking both Old and New Testament promptings of the teaching of *creatio ex nihilo* in preparation for explicating the relationship between the doctrines of creation and divine simplicity. From here, it has been argued, first, that the biblical doctrine requires an infinite power for the production of creation, indicating that God is *actus purus* and not composed of potentiality and actuality. Second, the biblical teaching that God is the source of all reality other than himself signals that he is *ipsum esse subsistens* rather than *ens per participationem*. Finally, the abolition of any *tertium quid* between God and the creature compels us to affirm that God really is each of his own perfections and that these are just diverse aspects of God himself or God's essence.

This material gives occasion to note briefly several ways in which the doctrine of divine simplicity surmounts some of the objections raised by recent theologians and philosophers. First, against the suspicion that it is less a biblical or Christian teaching than a capitulation to Hellenistic philosophy, it should be observed that the distinctly

biblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and its inferential commendation of divine simplicity yield a distinctly Christian provenance for this attribute.[584] Other religious traditions and philosophical schools have of course developed their own doctrines of divine simplicity, but this section, along with several previous ones, accentuates the point that, whatever other schools of thought may have to say in agreement or disagreement, *Christian* theology ought to retain a place for divine simplicity. Second, this divine attribute does not evacuate God of his multi-faceted richness. In light of *creatio ex nihilo*, each of God's perfections is identical with God himself, but, instead of depriving God of his immanent abundance, this identification only urges that God's utterly unique (and indelibly mysterious) *actus essendi* includes all that he is without the paucity of creaturely exemplification and partial differentiation. Third, God being *actus purus* does not dictate a theological inertia. In fact, *actus purus* tends in precisely the opposite direction: it is an implicate of God's mighty act of creation and as such magnifies that he is the radically living and active one who cannot and need not advance in brio or dynamism. Fourth, the identity of God with each of his perfections is not a depersonalization of God but a necessary consequent of the Bible's Creator-creature distinction. The concern about depersonalization on the part of certain analytic philosophers holds only if one begins and ends with a Procrustean account of abstract properties. However, we ought not to permit an *a priori* postulation of abstract properties to govern our understanding of God. Having already met the knowing, loving, willing, acting, speaking God of Holy Scripture, we ought to recast any would-be abstract properties found in God as aspects of God himself and submit our thinking to God's

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[584] On this, see Soskice, 'Athens and Jerusalem, Alexandria and Edessa'. Soskice explores the connections with Jewish thought as well.

characterization and enactment of his attributes in Scripture. Fifth, and finally, the identity of God's essence and existence is not a nonsensical claim. Though this identification strains the human mind or, to borrow Sokolowski's language, pushes it to the borderlands of reason, it does not violate the law of non-contradiction but simply acknowledges that God is the absolute origin of reality.

In this and the previous chapter an articulation of God's simplicity has been developed by moving from (generally) conceptually unadorned exegesis to dogmatic elaboration. The positive elaboration has enfolded a number of polemical excurses because of the contentious atmosphere in which discussions of this attribute now take place. The next and final chapter of this work pursues the reverse, allowing elenctic concerns to structure the material and yet along the way endeavoring to make positive statements that continue to fill out the articulation of divine simplicity in this study.

<center>**V.   Objections to Divine Simplicity**</center>

Though the account of God's simplicity in the previous chapters has anticipated certain objections and at points hinted at responses, this chapter identifies what are arguably the three most poignant objections and invests more in unfolding the major counterarguments. First, it is asked whether and how divine simplicity can do justice to the plurality of the divine attributes. In this section, concerns voiced by Barth and Pannenberg come to the fore, accompanied by criticisms found in the writings of analytic philosophers. Second, it is asked whether and how the notion of God as *actus purus* can preserve God's freedom in creating the world. If God is *actus purus* without any potency whereby he might newly choose to do something or not to do something, then it seems to some that he necessarily created the world and thus that divine simplicity, which at first sets out to secure the Creator-creature distinction, in fact has an ironic panentheistic underside threatening God's freedom. Third, it is asked whether and how God's simplicity can cohere with the doctrine of the Trinity, for, in the eyes of some, it appears that the real identity of all that is in God elides the distinctions among the triune persons.

A.   Divine Simplicity and the Plurality of the Attributes

i.   Barth, Pannenberg, and the Specter of Subjectivism

In tracking the history of the doctrine of divine simplicity, we have already observed some of Barth's reservations. While he is not opposed to identifying each of God's perfections with God himself, he does express misgivings about what he perceives

to be a 'partial nominalism' running through Protestant orthodox treatments of the divine attributes.[585] In Barth's view, Thomas, various Protestant scholastics, and Schleiermacher all forego a plurality in God's being by suggesting that the simplicity of God's essence (indeed, God's *nuda essentia*) is the only proper description of God, while the many *proprietates* are in fact 'improper' and 'secondary truths' that pertain to the economy only. Though these authors speak of an objective *fundamentum* for the plurality of the divine perfections, according to Barth, they never give an account of that *fundamentum* and thus leave the perfections to be mere rational constructs following on God's relationship to his creatures, robbing God of his immanent richness.[586] Championing the objective multiplicity and individuality of the divine perfections given to us in God's self-revelation, Barth asserts that 'every individual perfection in God is nothing but God himself and therefore nothing but every other divine perfection' and yet also that 'He is in essence not only one but multiple, individual, and diverse.' In dialectical fashion, God's being 'transcends the contrast of *simplicitas* and *multiplicitas*, including and reconciling both'.[587] Pannenberg too warns against attempts 'to trace back the multiplicity of qualities that are attributed to God…to the multiplicity of his outward relations, and in this way to rescue the unity of the divine essence'. In his judgment, this empties out God's essence and then also facilitates a 'projection of human limitations and experience into the divine essence'. For Barth, the problem of nominalism is close at hand, while, for Pannenberg, the specter of Feuerbachian projection threatens to bifurcate

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[585] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 323-6.
[586] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 327-9.
[587] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 330-3.

God's essence and God's revelatory action with its manifold representation of God.[588] In responding to these concerns and criticisms about the doctrine of divine simplicity developed by Thomas and Reformed orthodox theologians and taken up in this thesis, two points must be made.

First, the cautions of Barth and Pannenberg are useful reminders that the doctrine of divine simplicity must not be formulated so that God's essence is insulated from the perfections impressed upon us in God's economic revelation, lest the doctrine of the divine attributes be permitted only to oscillate between collapsing God into history (where the attributes would truly describe God) and unguided, subjective extrapolation about God *in se*. Barth writes,

> It is dangerous and ultimately fatal to faith in God if God is not the Lord of glory, if it is not guaranteed to us that in spite of the analogical nature of the language in which it all has to be expressed God is actually and unreservedly as we encounter Him in His revelation: the Almighty, the Holy, the Just, the Merciful, the Omnipresent, the Eternal, not less but infinitely more so than it is in our power to grasp, and not for us only, but in actuality and therefore in Himself.[589]

However, he goes much further in claiming that the Protestant orthodox (Quenstedt and Mastricht are the most recently referenced in this portion of *Church Dogmatics*) set forth a 'general conception of God' adrift of the doctrine of the Trinity that fosters an identification of God's life with 'pure being' so that 'divine simplicity was necessarily exalted to the all-controlling principle, the idol, which, devouring everything concrete, stands behind all these formulae.'[590] Yet even a cautiously sympathetic study of the Reformed orthodox theologians invoked in this articulation and defense of divine simplicity makes clear that they neither evacuate the essence of its multi-faceted richness

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[588] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:362-3.
[589] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 325.
[590] Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 329.

nor promote an opposition between essence and economy.[591] For, in the teaching on

simplicity retrieved here, one must observe the tenacity with which each of the

perfections is identified with God's essence. In opposition to the Socinians, Turretin, for

example, remarks, 'The attributes are not attributed properly to God, as something

ἐπουσιῶδες, which is accidental to the subject, which perfects that [the subject], and

which is really distinct from itself; but improperly and transumptively, as far as they are

called essential perfections of the divine nature, which are conceived by the mode of

properties by us.'[592] One might hastily latch onto the *improprie* here and assume that the

proprietates are indeed conceived as *impropriae* to God *in se*, but the opposite is the

case. In reality, the *improprie* does not concern whether the *proprietates* themselves are

proper to God but only the way in which they are ascribed to God. Breaking with

predicative convention, what we apprehend and characterize as divine properties are not

actually qualities inhering in God but rather only the divine essence variously represented

to us. In other words, the *improprie* does not signal that the *proprietates* are construed as

'secondary truths' over against the essence itself but rather calls attention to the fact that

these just are the essence itself, unsettling any perceived hegemony of the essence in such

an exposition of divine simplicity. Only a failure to take seriously this identification

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[591] Unfortunately, the influence of Barth's undue criticism of Reformed orthodox
theologians is widespread. For example, in a retrieval of Barth's theology of the
attributes, Christopher R. J. Holmes ('The Theological Function of the Doctrine of the
Divine Attributes and the Divine Glory, with Special Reference to Karl Barth and His
Reading of the Protestant Orthodox', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61 [2008], pp. 206-23)
simply assumes that Barth's negative appraisals of Polanus, Mastricht, and others are
accurate and does not directly engage their work, quoting such authors only by way of
citing Barth's *Church Dogmatics*.
[592] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 5, 2, p. 205.

enables one to opine that the plurality of the attributes and the immanent abundance of God are eclipsed by the simplicity of the essence.[593]

Of course, in a certain sense, the cognitive weakness of human persons is a *principium* of the plurality of the attributes: 'The attributes of God are which are ascribed to God in the Holy Scriptures, not so much toward the essence and nature of God to be explicated as toward declaring to us in some way for our mind that which can be known by us concerning him.' Yet, Polanus adds, 'The proper divine attributes' – eternity, holiness, goodness, and so on in contrast to the *impropria* or figurative and metaphorical attributes – 'are which belong properly to God, and hence also are said properly concerning God, if you consider the thing signified; although improperly, if [you consider] the mode of signifying.'[594] Thus, our cognitive frailty precipitates the many attributes not materially and referentially but only precisively and as to the *modus significandi*. In other words, what each attribute signifies is analogically but truly in God himself, while the consideration and construal of each attribute as formally distinct from the others and as though it were a quality 'belonging' to God is owing to the limitations of the human mind.

To be sure, because we use the terminology of 'essence', 'nature', and so on to signal what something is, we still often speak chiefly of the essence as that which must be addressed in *De Deo Uno*. But this is not an ontological (or, since God is not within the field of *ens in genere,* a theological) elevation of the divine essence above the various

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[593] The identification itself cannot be the impetus for Barth's criticism, for he himself upholds it. It seems, instead, that he simply wishes to ensure that each of the divine perfections in its individuality is attributed to God *in se* and mistakenly judges that the Protestant orthodox fail to do this.

[594] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae,* lib. 2, cap. 5, p. 137.

attributes (these are objectively identical to the essence) but only a pedagogical and heuristic tactic for the orderly shaping of minds in the study of God. In this sense, Mastricht states 'the attributes to belong to God, as it were, in some second being [*esse*], as far as we conceive the essence in priority, as the root from which the attributes arise. For we conceive God to be before we can conceive him to be, for example, merciful, wise, just.'[595] This statement, which is quoted and chided in Barth's diagnosis of 'partial nominalism', does not claim that the essence objectively underlies the perfections and evades the referential purchase of our speech about God but rather benignly points up that we naturally apprehend and presuppose that God is and is God prior – and this 'prior' is logical, not chronological, and need not infer any temporal interval in the *ordo inventionis* – to discovering that this God knows, loves, wills, and so on. From here, the divine essence is characterized by the attribute of simplicity, and this does not occlude the many other perfections as long as treatment of God's unity proceeds in due course to discuss the multiple attributes in their distinctness. Thus, this traditional understanding and commendation of God's simplicity does not evacuate God's essence of the richness of the diverse attributes or bifurcate God *in se* and God *pro nobis* in his economic plurality. For materially and referentially the various attributes do truly pertain to God *in se*, while only as to the *modus cognoscendi* (*praecisive*) and the *ordo cognoscendi* are the diverse attributes conditioned by us and undergirded by the essence.

Second, to complement the fact that our cognitive weakness is a *principium cognoscendi internum* of the multiple and individual attributes only as to the manner of

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[595] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 5, 7, p. 94. The notion that the attributes are in an *esse secundo* because they do not pertain to the *ratio formalis* of the divine essence is found earlier in William Ames, *Medulla Theologica*, *editio novissima* (Amsterdam, 1659), lib. 1, cap. 4, 27, p. 12.

conceiving, there are both a *principium essendi* and a *principium cognoscendi externum* of the attributes that together preclude an expulsion of the richness of God's essence or an opposition between God's essence and his economic revelation.[596] The *principium essendi* is the plenitude of God, which cannot be conveyed in a single human concept.[597] As Thomas writes in *De Ente et Essentia*, though God is called *esse tantum*, 'it is not proper that the remaining perfections and nobilities should be wanting in him. On the contrary, he has all perfections which are in all genera, on account of which he is called simply perfect…but he has these in a mode more excellent to all things, because in him they are one, but in others they have diversity.'[598] Again, 'all the perfections of things, which are in created things dividedly and multiply, preexist in God unitedly.'[599] Thus, God's simplicity is not *imum simplex* (the 'lowest simple'), which lacks in all things, but rather *summum simplex* (the 'highest simple'), which lacks in nothing.[600] Accordingly, the divine essence contains the distinct and individual attributes *virtualiter* and *eminenter*. That is, the essence is capacious of producing various works whose diverse characters are traceable to attributes of diverse *rationes formales ad nos* even as these attributes are materially and formally identical as a *virtus eminens* in God himself, which is God's own

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[596] It should be carefully noted that, while the argument here contends that divine simplicity is compatible with an essence-economy alignment, it would not be helpful to press into an elision of the essence-economy distinction. In other words, while it is important to maintain that God *in se* and God *pro nobis* are not at odds, it is equally important to maintain that God *in se* is not constituted by his action *pro nobis* or comprehensively revealed to us in that action.

[597] 'Although all the attributes represent the most fecund and simple nature of God, they nevertheless cannot but inadequately represent it, that is according to the whole reason [*ratio*] of itself, but now under this perfection, now under another' (Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae,* III, qu. 5, 2, pp. 205-6).

[598] Thomas, *De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 5, p. 378.

[599] Thomas, *ST* Ia, qu. 13, art. 5, p. 146.

[600] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 14, p. 135.

plenitude and fecundity. The attributes, then, are distinct *virtualiter* or *eminenter* in that

God's singular, multi-dimensional capacity (*virtus eminens*) yields the *opera Dei ad extra*

which set forth the distinct *ratio formalis* of each attribute to our conception.[601] Yet, lest

the *virtualiter-eminenter* presence of the attributes in God be charged with still allowing a

cleavage between the concrete attributes and the essence, it may be added that the

attributes are also *formaliter* in God. That is, they are themselves identical with the

forma or essence of God, though in the *ratio formalis* or *modus concipendi* of the

attributes they are not identical with the essence, arising afterward in the *ordo*

concipiendi.[602]

Along with this *principium essendi* of the distinct attributes, there is the

principium cognoscendi externum. While the *principium essendi* (God's plenitude) is

materially and referentially a *principium* of the distinct attributes, the *principium*

cognoscendi externum (the prism of God's economic activity) is still *extra nos* but also a

principium of not only the *distinct attributes* but also the *distinction of the attributes*.

While the various perfections are not really distinct from one another in God himself, the

impinging of the divine essence in God's historical action on different objects with

different effects generates the multiplicity and individuality of the attributes. So Leigh:

'whatsoever is in God, the same is God. God's wisdom is himself, and his Power is

himself….All these are also one in him; his Mercy is his Justice, and his Justice is his

Mercy…only they differ in our apprehension, and in regard of their different objects and

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[601] See, e.g., Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 8, qu. 5, pp. 19-20; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 5, 6, p. 206; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 5, 7, pp. 93-4.

[602] Ames, *Medulla Theologica*, lib. 1, cap. 4, 26, p. 12; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 5, 7, p. 94.

effects.'[603] That is, the attributes are multiplied and distinguished 'in objects and effects, and by relation, which is between an attribute and its object'.[604] The distinction of the attributes, then, is not an *immediata distinctio realis* but rather a *mediata distinctio realis*, 'which has a foundation in a mediate thing, that is, which by itself, in itself, and of itself is not in the thing, but in…the power and operation or effect.' The distinct attributes are thus in God *virtualiter*, *eminenter*, and *effective*.[605] On account of this, the multiplicity of the attributes is not proactively conjured up *per rationem ratiocinantem* (which ratiocination produces only a *distinctio rationis* that 'has no foundation in things, but arises from mere negation of the intellect') but rather responsively discerned *per rationem ratiocinatam* (which produces a *distinctio rationis* that enjoys a *fundamentum in rebus*, 'not indeed considered in themselves, but by reason of power and effects').[606]

The *virtus* and *effectus* of God denominated as a *fundamentum in re mediatum* for the *distinctio realis mediata* of the attributes deliver an objective ground for plurality of the attributes, and this falsifies Barth's claim that the Reformed orthodox never identify or explain the *fundamentum in re* and so subjectivize the attributes. Indeed, Barth himself fails to venture an account of a *fundamentum* and merely asserts, albeit emphatically, that we must take very seriously God's revelation of the various attributes and the multiplicity of the attributes in God himself. If this is an indicator that he would have preferred a *distinctio realis immediata* in the divine attributes, then it must be said

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[603] Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 2, p. 134.

[604] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practico Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 23, p. 104. That the individual attributes come to light in the economy does not mean that they pertain to God only in the economy. In other words, the *res significata* cannot be collapsed into the *modus significandi*.

[605] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 29, pp. 240, 242. Yet, as noted above, the attributes in a sense are in God *formaliter* as well.

[606] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 29, p. 238.

that this would be simply to negate the real identity of God's attributes with God himself and with one another and therefore to cause Barth's own advocacy of divine simplicity to lapse into incoherence.

In sum, the rendition of the *principia* of the distinct attributes in this study ensures, in response to Barth, that the richness of the attributes is not taken out of the divine essence so as to impoverish the essence and relegate the material content of the attributes to the economy, and it ensures, in response to Pannenberg, that there is no allowance of an essence-economy bifurcation or projectionist approach to the doctrine of the divine attributes. The principial role of our cognitive limitation (the *principium cognoscendi internum*) pertains to only the manner in which we conceive of the attributes (*abstractio praecisiva*) and thus still recognizes that the perfection of each of the attributes is in God himself and, indeed, really is God himself. The plenitude of God (the *principium essendi* of the distinct attributes) vouchsafes that each of the attributes truly finds its ontological, or, better, theological, ground in and indeed *as* God's very essence. Finally, the divine essence in God's economic action bearing on different objects with different effects (the *principium cognoscendi externum* of the distinct attributes and of the distinction of the attributes too) yields a *fundamentum in re mediatum* and thus also an *extra nos* and therefore objective basis for the distinct and individual attributes ascribed to God in Christian theology. The problems with positing real distinctions among the essence and attributes have been sketched above and now it should be clear that, when one posits that these are really identical with God and with one another, one can still account for the richness, distinction, and individuation of the divine attributes.

ii.   The Analytic Quest for Logical Coherence

Alongside various theologians, several prominent analytic philosophers question whether the doctrine of divine simplicity can do justice to the plurality of the attributes. Plantinga judges that the real identity of all of God's 'properties' is 'flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; he has both power and mercifulness, say, neither of which is identical with the other.'[607] Beginning with robust confidence in our knowledge of properties and predication, Copan and Moreland reason that

> to say that God does not have distinct properties seems patently false: omnipotence is not the same property as goodness, for a being may have one and not the other. It might be said that God's omnipotence and goodness, as manifestations of a single divine property, differ in our conception only as, say, 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' have different senses but both refer to the same reality, Venus. But this response is inadequate. For *being the morning star* and *being the evening star* are two distinct properties, both possessed by Venus; the same entity has these two distinct properties. In the same way, being omnipotent and being good are not different senses for the same property (as are, say, *being even* and *being divisible by two*) but are clearly distinct properties. Even if God has both properties in virtue of being in the same intrinsic state, he nonetheless has both of these different properties.[608]

Against the notion that each divine 'property' is identical with God himself, they insist that this depersonalizes God.

> It does no good…to say that God's being identical with this essence will simply force us to revise our concept of what a property is like. For we clearly grasp some of the essential characteristics of properties and of abstract objects in general, so as to be able confidently to assert that anything that is a personal agent just is not a property.[609]

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[607] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 47.
[608] Copan and Craig, *Creation out of Nothing*, pp. 177-8.
[609] Copan and Craig, *Creation out of Nothing*, p. 178.

These sentiments are representative of some (thought not necessarily all) of contemporary analytic philosophy and theology, and, in response, several things may be observed.

First, with these writers there is a tendency to dilute the term 'property' so that it is no longer an accident or quality that inexorably follows on the essence of a thing but is inclusive of virtually anything that can be predicated of something. Hence Copan and Craig are able to claim that 'being the morning star' and 'being the evening star' are 'properties' of Venus rather than mere extrinsic denominations of it. Thus, curiously, with such a thin account of properties, there is, on the one hand, a detachment of 'properties' from any requisite intrinsic structure of a thing and a consequent widening of what may be regarded as a property and, on the other hand, a reification of 'properties' in this extended sense so that what were once regarded as extrinsic denominations of a thing are now required to become actual constituents of a thing. Though this shift in ontology is problematic in its own right, the matter is exacerbated when it is then thrust beyond the bounds of created being and foisted upon God's being by Morris, for example, who claims that one of God's properties is 'being such that $2 + 2 = 4$'.[610] Yet, even when one recognizes that such 'properties' are no properties at all and that they are not intrinsic to created beings – much less to God – there remains the question of how legitimate divine perfections or properties such as God's wisdom, justice, love, and so on can be identical to one another, and this leads into the next point.

Second, the analytic exasperation about the real identity of God's perfections or properties turns on the presumption of univocity and on overzealousness for the

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[610] Morris, 'On God and Mann', pp. 313-14.

application of analytic philosophers' (in some respects faulty even in relation to created being) general metaphysical cartography. It is in this connection that Plantinga can disparage divine simplicity's incongruence with the 'obvious fact' of God's many properties and that Copan and Craig can insist that, because 'we clearly grasp some of the essential characteristics of properties and of abstract objects in general', we must be able to translate these with strict correspondence into the field of theological description. However, if theological considerations, such as the manner in which the aseity of God precludes that God should have inhering qualities other than himself that enable him to be what he is and act as he does, drive us to draw a sharp Creator-creature distinction and to reconsider the inner logic of the divine attributes, then the presumption of univocity is punctured by the material content of Scripture and the instrumental deployment of *ratio recta* in systematic theology. An analogical account of theological description is in order, in which the *res significata* of each of the properties is truly in God and indeed is God himself, while the *modus significandi* is reconsidered according to the uniqueness of the biblical God, yielding a relinquishment of the penchant to stencil the structures of creaturely ontology or cognition onto God's being. On the one hand, God's properties taken materially are indeed proper to him: they 'are called properties, because they are peculiar to his Majesty, and are so in him, as they are not in any creature'. On the other hand, they are present in God differently than in the creature:

> These Properties differ from those Properties, which are given to men and Angels. In God they are Infinite, Unchangeable and Perfect, even the Divine Essence it self; and therefore indeed all one and the same; but in men and Angels they are finite, changeable and imperfect, meer [*sic*] qualities, divers, they receiving them by participation only.[611]

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[611] Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 2, pp. 133, 135.

Again, 'The essential properties of God do not differ from the essence nor among themselves, really, but merely in reason,' while in creatures 'properties are really distinguished from their own subjects, and from one another, and are not the thing itself, of which they are properties, but they are something παρεπόμενον τῇ φύσει.'[612] It should be clear that this is not at all a pathway to agnosticism in the doctrine of God but simply a refraction of our predicative habits in deference to biblical revelation and its theological implications.[613] The *proprietates* still accurately describe God even as they do so in a manner that chastens and reframes theological speech.

Third, there is still a *fundamentum* in God himself for each of the divine attributes, but the *fundamentum* is one and the same for each of them: God's own singular, almighty plenitude. To deny that God himself might be the sole 'truthmaker'[614] for each of the attributes is both to cut against the grain of scriptural teaching on God's singularity, aseity, infinity, and act of *creatio ex nihilo* and also to lean heavily on the sheer assumption that our patterns of conceiving of the mundane or perhaps even 'the surface syntactic form' of our sentences must govern God's being.[615] But, because Holy Scripture implies along several lines that God's perfections are none other than God himself, and because objective reality should regulate our speech and not the other way around – *res non sunt multiplicandae secundum verba*[616] – it is well to uphold that God's

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[612] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars 1, cap. 4, p. 37.
[613] As noted earlier, only equivocity or an entirely metaphorical approach to theological language ends in agnosticism.
[614] The 'truthmaker' defense of the real identity of all of God's perfections is taken up by Brower, 'Making Sense of Divine Simplicity', pp. 17-24; Dolezal, *God without Parts*, pp. 154-63.
[615] Graham Robert Oppy, 'The Devilish Complexities of Divine Simplicity', *Philo* 6 (2003), p. 17.
[616] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 3, p. 35.

one *actus essendi* singularly includes all the attributes in an aspectival fashion even in the face of contemporary misunderstanding and bafflement about this theologoumenon.

Fourth, it should not be overlooked that the divine attributes, while referentially identical, are nevertheless still denotatively diverse.[617] Thomas, for example, explicitly rejects the synonymy of the attributes: 'the names attributed to God, although they signify one thing, nevertheless, because they signify it under many and diverse reasons [*rationibus*], are not synonymous.' He adds that 'the many reasons [*rationes*] of these names are not useless and vain, because to all these one simple thing answers, represented by all in this way multiply and imperfectly.'[618] Likewise Turretin: 'because what in one adequate concept, as finite, we cannot obtain, in various inadequate concepts we divide that we might have some knowledge of it; which is not a testimony of error in the intellect, but merely of imperfection.'[619] Under the infinity and incomprehensibility of the divine essence and the finitude and frailty of the human intellect, one actually has no choice but to consider the divine essence under various aspects pointed up by various attributes with diverse content. This is not only an affirmation of semantic variegation in theology proper but also a means of steering between triumphalism and subjective projection in theological description: we cannot know or name the divine essence in itself and yet each time we speak of God's righteousness, his goodness, and so on we are imperfectly but truly referencing and characterizing God's essence.

Fifth, and finally, it is misguided to argue that the distinction between God's incommunicable attributes and his communicable attributes generates at least one

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[617] Cf. Leftow, 'Is God an Abstract Object?', p. 373; Brower, 'Making Sense of Divine Simplicity', p. 16.
[618] Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 4, corp. and ad 2, pp. 144-5.
[619] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 5, 3, p. 206.

difference between some attributes and others that precludes the real identity of them. In his analysis of God having 'insular' and 'shared' attributes, Hughes, for example, writes, 'There will be a distinction…between different divine perfections – some of which are, and some of which are not, shared with creatures, and different ones of which are shared with different creatures.'[620] However, as Dolezal observes, this judgment trades on the dubious presupposition that God and creatures exemplify various properties located in a Platonic collection of such that are neither God himself nor created things.[621] Only when one takes for granted this type of ontological framework, in which there is a cognate participation on the part of God and the creature alike, can one read the communicability of certain of God's attributes in such a way that there might be a real distinction between the incommunicable and communicable attributes. By contrast, if in view of the aseity and ultimacy of the the triune God along with the universal scope of *creatio ex nihilo*, one commences with the real identity of each of God's perfections with God himself, then a rather different account of the communicable attributes emerges, one that of course does not sanction any real distinctions among the attributes.[622] Each of God's perfections is God himself and thus God is *sua sapientia subsistens*, *sua caritas subsistens*, and so on. Because God alone is the source of all being with no eternal co-existents, the *sua* may be modulated with *ipsa* without running the risk of departicularizing God, and we may then say that God is *ipsa sapientia subsistens*, *ipsa caritas subsistens*, and so on. This is to assert that God does not participate or instantiate abstract universals in order to

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[620] Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, p. 68.
[621] Dolezal, *God without Parts*, pp. 147-51.
[622] It may be important to clarify that this is not a case of circular reasoning (real identity, and, therefore, real identity), for it is the biblical portrayal of God's attributes that suggests the real identity of these, and then the task is simply to indicate how this reshapes, without denying, the notion of communicability.

be what he is, and it is concomitantly to assert that wisdom, love, and so on have no

primordial being apart from God himself but are rather eternally particular in and as God

himself. Accordingly, the singular abundance of God includes the material content of all

his perfections. The question of communicability and participation, then, does not

concern *which parts* of God's being may be shared by creatures but rather should be

parsed in terms of *which ways* that singular abundance of God may be finitely

participated by creatures. Knowing his own simple essence and, by his essence, all the

ways in which he might be finitely participated, God chooses to actualize some of these.

Then, because God condescends to reveal himself to us under different aspects, we are

able to identify certain aspects of God's simple essence that are imaged forth in creatures

and name these with 'communicable attributes'. Of course, this must be carefully

qualified lest one give the impression that the essence itself is 'instantiated' by

creatures.[623] Simplicity does not entail this because the divine essence as a whole and as

such is not communicated to creatures; rather, the essence as finitely participable is

finitely and analogically participated by creatures. While the essence itself is simple and

indivisible, it is participated dividedly *ex parte creaturae*.[624] As Turretin writes,

> Note communication to be twofold; one essential and formal by the intrinsic being
> [*esse*] of a thing, another by similitude and analogical in respect of effects and
> works. With respect to the prior, we say all the properties of God to be equally

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[623] Gale (*Nature and Existence of God*, p. 24) believes that divine simplicity implies such
instantiation.

[624] So Thomas: 'every effect not equaling the power of the cause acting receives a
similitude of the agent not according to the same reason, but deficiently, so that what
dividedly and multiply is in the effects is in the cause simply and in the same way….All
the perfections of things which are in creatures dividedly and multiply preexist in God
unitedly' (*ST*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 5, corp., p. 146). The partial character of creaturely
participation has its ground not in a complexity in God but rather in the finitude of the
creature.

incommunicable, which cannot be communicated any more than the divine essence; otherwise they cease to be properties.[625]

Thus, all of God's properties are formally incommunicable, even as there are some 'obscure vestiges in creatures'.[626] One can therefore maintain that God is simple, that some of his attributes may be termed 'communicable', and that this does not entail that creatures should somehow instantiate divinity.

In sum, contemporary analytic objections to divine simplicity on the basis of a perceived inability to cohere with the plurality of God's attributes do not succeed in undermining this doctrine. These objections are rooted in faulty conceptions of the nature of properties and the nature of theological language and do not take into account that the teaching of God's simplicity still acknowledges a *fundamentum* in God for the distinct attributes, a distinction between reference and denotation vis-à-vis the attributes, and the communicability of some of the attributes. Having addressed concerns about simplicity in relation to the question of the multiplicity of God's attributes, we turn our attention now to the question of whether divine simplicity is inimical to God's freedom.

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[625] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 6, 2, p. 208.

[626] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III. qu. 6, 3, p. 208. If one might be tempted to respond that such communicable attributes have the 'property' of 'having creaturely vestiges' and are therefore not really identical with the incommunicable attributes, it may be reiterated that this discussion concerns only distinct aspects not things and, moreover, that this sort of 'property' is in fact not a property at all but only an extrinsic denomination.

B.   **Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom**

i.   **Recent Proposals**

In view of the fact that God is said to be *actus purus* and that each of God's

attributes is said to be identical with the others in the doctrine of divine simplicity, some

theologians and philosophers have asked whether this undermines the freedom of God.

For, if God is pure act and has always been without potentiality, then it seems that he

must do as he does. It seems that he never was able freely to elect to do something or not

to do something, and this appears to contradict the freedom of God in the work of

creation. For this reason, Richards, for example, proposes that God's being includes

potentiality, and that this secures the freedom of God to create or not to create the world.

In addition, Richards writes, if God is *actus purus* without any residual potency, then he

should do all that he possibly can do, including creating all possible worlds, which he has

not done.[627] Other authors have concluded that simplicity stands in conflict with divine

freedom because of the identity of God, God's essence, and God's attributes. Morris

speaks of defenders of divine simplicity facing the problem of a 'modal uniformity'

among God's attributes.[628] Similarly, Copan and Craig argue that

> if God is not distinct from his essence, then God cannot know or do anything
> different from what he knows and does. He can have no contingent knowledge or
> action, for everything about him is essential to him. But in that case, all modal
> distinctions collapse and everything becomes necessary. Since "God knows that
> *p*" is logically equivalent to "*p* is true," the necessity of the former entails the

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[627] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 234-5.
[628] Morris, 'On God and Mann', p. 311.

necessity of the latter. Thus, divine simplicity leads to an extreme fatalism, according to which everything that happens does so with logical necessity.[629]

To the extent that advocates of divine simplicity wish to retain the freedom of God in the work of creation, this represents a significant challenge – indeed, perhaps the most difficult for a traditional understanding of divine simplicity[630] – and it has garnered several responses in the literature.

In their engagement with this issue, Stump and Kretzmann opt to 'weaken' divine simplicity and openly concede that 'God is not the same in all possible worlds.' Only given an 'initial-state set' – roughly, a set of chosen creaturely circumstances on which the (formerly indeterminate) will of God is now terminated – is God fully in act and determinate.[631] However, in response to Stump and Kretzmann, Ross rightly highlights that this is an enervation of divine simplicity and that, if the doctrine is to be preserved, it must perpetuate God's 'trans-world' simplicity.[632] Valicella propounds another strategy for harmonizing divine simplicity and the contingency of creation: 'The simplicity theorist need not hold that God is identical with all his properties; he need only hold that he is identical with all his essential properties. Thus we cannot accept the Augustinian idea that a simple being "is what it has" (*quod habet hoc est*) without qualifications.' He then sketches a threefold classification of God's properties in which some are 'quidditative' (e.g., omniscience), others are 'essential' (e.g., knowing that $2 + 2 = 4$),

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[629] Copan and Craig, *Creation out of Nothing*, pp. 178-9.

[630] Leftow light-heartedly comments that the issue must be resolved 'by magic' ('Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom', in Kevin Timpe (ed.), *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy [London and New York: Routledge, 2009], p. 36).

[631] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Absolute Simplicity', pp. 355, 362-9,

[632] James Ross, 'Comments on "Absolute Simplicity"', pp. 383, 387-8.

and some are 'accidental' (e.g., 'the property of having created this world').[633] Yet here

there is, not only a strange distinction between quiddity and essence as well as (once

more) a proliferation and attenuation of what should be catalogued as a property, but also

a distinction between essence and accidents in God that either misrepresents what an

accident is or rebuffs the aseity and infinity of God and ultimately takes leave of

traditional articulations of divine simplicity.[634]

Taking yet another approach, Rogers resists the temptation to posit potentiality or

accidents in God's being and candidly foregoes the freedom of God to create or not to

create the world. She writes that there is no 'distinction in God between a primordial

nature and one consequent upon creation'. Instead, 'there is just God, whose primordial

nature is to be the simple act in which He knows all that He knows and does all that He

does, including responding to the free choices of His creatures.' This means that 'there is

only one possible world,' and that '[b]ecause God chooses that it should be so, we affect

God's very nature.'[635] Though Rogers states that God's choosing to be affected by us is

not necessarily at odds with his aseity, only a substantially modified (and arguably

incoherent) version of aseity can claim that God is uncaused and chooses to be causally

affected by his creatures. On Rogers' account, it seems that simplicity, which was once a

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[633] Valicella, 'Divine Simplicity', pp. 517-19.

[634] In traditional metaphysical discourse, quiddity and essence are one and the same. The former is the latter taken as an answer to the question *quid est* (Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3, p. 43). Further, in Valicella's comments, it seems that the term 'accident' no longer refers to a feature inhering in a thing but rather just to something that is contingently predicated of a thing. If, on the other hand, the term is meant to bear a traditional meaning, then as qualities whereby God is enabled to be *qualis* and to act as he does, then God's putative accidents would be in tension with his aseity and his infinity, insofar as his infinity implies the utter perfection and real identity of God's attributes.

[635] Rogers, 'Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', p. 186.

bulwark of divine aseity, circles back to dissolve God's aseity . Finally, Timothy

O'Connor develops an account of personal agency that he applies to God in an effort to

demonstrate the compatibility of divine simplicity and divine freedom. He suggests that

we normally conceive of a personal agent having a purpose in acting and then

consequently generating 'an intention whose content is *that C obtain in order to fulfill P*',

which then issues in 'C's obtaining'. In the case of God, we might 'treat the executive

state of intention as an inessential middleman in the causal process of purposive agency'.

Thus, with God, 'there's just (i) an agent with reasons for various possible creations, and

(ii) a relation of dependency between that agent and the actual creation, such that the

product might have been utterly different, and the agent utterly the same.' Yet O'Connor

recognizes that his account does not leave room for God not to will to create at all, and he

agrees with Kretzmann that God is compelled to create some world.[636] All of the

aforementioned attempts to align God's simplicity and freedom weaken one or the other.

To contend for the compability of these in their more traditional cast, a different tack is

needed, and this is where, once again, a retrieval of Reformed orthodox treatments proves

fruitful.

ii. Parsing the Divine Decree

In handling the will of God and attendant questions about whether God is free to

create or not to create, we may begin by marking that the term 'will' can be used in

several different senses. As Mastricht parses it, it can denote the *facultas volendi*, the

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[636] Timothy O'Connor, 'Simplicity and Creation', *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999), pp. 406-11.

actus istius facultatis or *volitio*, and the *objectum* or *volitum*. However, a firm distinction

must be drawn between the *voluntas creata* and the *voluntas Dei*, for the former is

characterized by dependency, change, and imperfection, precluding a univocity of the

will in creatures and the Creator.[637] With God, the *facultas volendi* does not differ from

the *actus volendi* as though God should shift from passive potency to act. The *actus*

volendi has never oscillated between idleness and activity but from all eternity has always

been in act.[638] Indeed, the *facultas* and *actus volendi* are simply *ipse Deus volens*. But

this divine *volitio* has a twofold object: 'the primary certainly is God, as infinite good; the

secondary truly are all created things outside God, which have the reason of finite good,

which God wills also outside himself, but not in the same way; himself indeed

necessarily through complacency, all others truly freely by decree.'[639] These two objects

are related to one another as *finis* to *media* and thus Mastricht describes the will of God

as 'his most wise inclination, unto himself as the highest end, and unto creatures on

account of himself as media'. The *propter se* indicates that, insofar as creaturely media

'carry an image of his own goodness' and conduce to his glory, they are 'fittingly

born'.[640]

God's willing himself is characterized by a *necessitas absoluta* ('he is the ultimate

end and highest good, which he is not able not to will and love') but also by a *libertas*

spontaneitatis (a freedom from coaction or external compulsion). His willing creatures is

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[637] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 15, 4, 6, p. 158.
[638] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 15, 7, p. 159.
[639] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 141, p. 241.
[640] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 15, 8, p. 159. If this line of
reasoning appears to be overly abstract, one need only recall biblical texts such as
Romans 11:36 and 1 Corinthians 8:6 to remember that Scripture itself speaks of God
creating all things from and for himself.

characterized by a *necessitas hypothetica* (an immutability of will given a particular decision) but also by both a *libertas spontaneitatis* and a *libertas indifferentiae* (not a careless or flippant bearing but a freedom to create or not to create without any consequences for his own preveniently abundant and blessed triune life).[641] The pressing question is whether such a claim about the freedom of the divine will *ad creaturas* is overridden by the doctrine of divine simplicity with its characterization of God as *actus purus*.

In order to demonstrate, without presuming to decipher entirely what is finally a mystery of divinity, the coherence of the liberty of indifference in God's decretive will and the pure actuality of God, a careful schematic of the decree is required.[642] The divine decree has three features helpfully educed by Reformed orthodox writers with some variety in the niceties of formulation. Voetius, for example, writes that in God's decree there are three things to be observed: 1) 'the essence of God signified by the mode of a vital act, as far as it is terminated necessarily toward the divine goodness itself to be loved, and toward everything possible or producible by God'; 2) 'the termination of that active essence toward creatures to be produced and so governed'; and 3) 'a relation of reason [*relatio rationis*], which results from that termination'. The essence of course is *ipse Deus decernens* and thus *simpliciter necessaria*, but the *terminatio ad creaturas* is not *ipse Deus* and thus *simpliciter libera*.[643] A slightly different analysis can be found in Mastricht, who also identifies three features of the decree: (1) 'the act decreeing, which is

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[641] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 14, 2-6, pp. 241-2.

[642] For a more thorough examination of Reformed scholastic treatments, see Steven J. Duby, 'Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation: Dogmatic Responses to Some Analytic Questions', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012), pp. 132-6.

[643] Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, I, pp. 239-41.

not but the essence of God itself, considered toward a mode of vital act or God himself decreeing'; (2) 'its tendency and relation to an object'; and (3) 'the thing decreed, or to be produced in time, which really differs from God'. With respect to the first, the decree is one, necessary, and eternal; with respect to the second, it is free and multiple.[644]

In taking up this architectonics of the decree, it is critical to recognize that God is eternally decisive and never without the exercise of his will. Indeed, the divine will must have some tendency toward something (lest *decerneret…absque decreto*), even if God were to will only himself (not in that he might cause himself to be but rather in that he delights in his own goodness) and entertain only a negative tendency toward all else. This means that the *libertas indifferentiae* infers no deliberation or volitional languor on the part of God; instead, the *indifferentia* is an *indifferentia naturalis* 'of a most simple act toward an object, with which it is able to be terminated or not; or toward this preferable [*hoc potius*], rather than toward that'.[645] On the other hand, while there must be some tendency toward something, no particular tendency is necessary. God is free *ad sic aut aliter decernendum*.[646] This is because the *tendentia* of the *actus decernendi* is *merum respectum* and hence not identical with God's essence and so not characterized by the pure actuality and absolute necessity of God's essence: 'so far the decree differs from the essence, as which [*essentia*] does not involve a tendency and relation of this kind.'[647] As Alsted aptly summarizes, the decree is necessary *secundum exercitium & principium*

[644] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 1, 15, p. 275.
[645] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 15, 7, p. 159; lib. 3, cap. 1, 21, p. 276. Cf. Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, IV, qu. 2, 13, p. 346.
[646] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 1, 21, p. 276.
[647] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 1, 15, p. 275.

and free *secundum specificationem & terminum*.[648] On this account of the divine decree,

then, God is *actus purus* and yet also entirely free to create or not to create, or to create

one world rather than another.[649]

However, there are two clarifications that must still be made. First, the *tendentia*

of the act of decreeing toward a certain constellation of creaturely circumstances is not a

thing in God that produces composition. Mastricht explains, 'that tendency is not but a

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[648] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars. 1, cap. 16, p. 140. Because Oliphint reads only
Turretin on this point and neither ventures an adequate analysis of the terminology nor
considers other (and, in some ways, clearer) expositions, he concludes simply that '[t]he
language here seems confused' (*God with Us*, pp. 257-9). An assessment of Oliphint's
location of the freedom of the decree in God's 'covenantal condescension' is beyond this
study. It may be said, however, that it is based on a problematic supposition that God can
assume (in an anticipatory relation to the incarnation) properties of a creaturely nature
without having yet assumed such a nature in the incarnation (see *God with Us*, pp. 181-
222).

[649] In relating the question of the necessity of the decree to the question of whether God
must know as he knows and must therefore create the world, two things may be said.
First, as described above, God knows the forms of all things by his own essence rather
than by adventitious noetic reception, and this entails that God knows, at least
specifically, truly contingent things without any affront to his own antecedent actuality.
For God does not acquire this specific knowledge *ab extrinseco*. Second, insofar as God
knows not just the species of things but also singular things themselves, he knows them
by knowing his own power and will which in specific determination either contain or do
not contain given singular things as forthcoming effects. Thomas writes, 'God
knows…these which he can make and does not make. Thence from this, that he can
make more than he makes, it does not follow that he can know more than he knows,
unless this is referred to the knowledge of vision [*scientiam visionis*], according to which
he is said to know these which are in act according to some time. From this,
nevertheless, that he knows that other things are able to be which are not, or are able not
to be which are, it does not follow that his own knowledge is variable, but that he knows
the variability of things.' Moreover, since the *scientia visionis* is eternal, God never
acquires new knowledge of what is to come (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 14, art. 15, ad 2,
p. 195). Thus, in parallel with the anatomy of the decretive will of God, in which the
specific determination about singular things is a free *tendentia*, the divine knowledge as
to the *actus sciendi* itself is fully in act and absolutely necessary while the turning or
tendentia of that *actus* toward the forthcoming actuality of contingent things is truly
comprehensive of those things and yet not a determinant of the actuality of the
knowledge, which means that it is entirely free with no threat to the purity of God's
actuality. Compare Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars 1, cap. 10, pp. 94-8.

relation, which properly has no being [*entitatem*] with which it can compose.'[650] In

condensed and axiomatic form, *relatio non componit, sed distinguit*.[651] Even in the case

of a predicamental relation, the relation is not an *ens per se* but only *per suum*

fundamentum (i.e., some accident by virtue of which one *ens* is related to another).[652]

The *tendentia* of the decree, therefore, is not a thing ἐν τινὶ but rather a *respectus* πρὸς

τι.[653] Thus, older metaphysical classifications ministerially annexed for theological

exposition open up another possible construal for the tendency of the decree as *merus*

respectus so that it is neither identical with God himself in contradiction to the freedom

of God's creative work nor a thing inhering in God in contradiction to his simplicity.

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[650] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 1, 28, p. 277.

[651] E.g., Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 5, p. 260; Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 6, p. 256.

[652] Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars prior, cap. 14, p. 2033; Maccovius, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 6, p. 251. A *relatio transcendentalis* is one that does not have an accident as a *fundamentum* but is a bare *respectus* or *ordo* between two things and transcends the *praedicamenta* in metaphysics, while a *relatio praedicamentalis* is one that does have an accident as a *fundamentum* and thus not *per se* but in conjunction with its *fundamentum* falls under the *praedicamenta* in traditional metaphysics. See Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 20, p. 163; lib. 2, cap. 5, pp. 258-60; Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 6, pp. 251-3, 56, 260-1. Of course, to retain God's simplicity, one must construe the *tendentia* or *respectus* of the decree as a *relatio transcendentalis*, one without an accidental foundation. In this study, it has been argued that the aseity and infinity of God in particular preclude the presence of accidents in God.

[653] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 6, 23, p. 104. Yet, in denying that the relation of the decree compounds it is also said that this relation modifies (e.g., Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, IV, qu. 1, 16, p. 344), and this elicits the question of whether the relation as a mode must finally be regarded as God himself in a certain manner or disposition and thus as necessary. However, drawing from Alsted's taxonomy of *modi entium* (*Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 5, p. 59), it may be said that *respectivi modi puri* – such as the *tendentia* of the decree – strictly speaking have no entity but are just a *respectus ad aliud*, which implies that the decretive *tendentia* is not characterized by the necessity of God's being. This is different from the case of the divine persons as *modi subsistendi*, which are *modi entitativi*, really identical with God himself under a certain relation toward another divine person.

Second, one may ask whether God must still choose the *tendentia* itself, in which case the pure actuality of the divine will would seem after all to nullify God's freedom to create or not to create this world or another. However, it should be noted that, strictly speaking, God's decision to assume one decretive *tendentia* rather than another does not impinge on the matter of his actuality. That is, his specification about the existence or non-existence of the world does not and cannot move him from passive potency into act. In Reformed orthodoxy, this is signaled in terms of the hyperphysical character of God's action: 'The action of God is not a physical motion [*motus*], or metaphysical, but hyperphysical…which is not called motion except κατ᾽ ἀναλογίαν….For motion is an accident.'[654] Therefore, in the procession from the signified act to the exercised act, the decretive specification need not be assimilated to the *actus purus* (and thereby rendered absolutely necessary) in order to preserve the *actus purus* as such. Just so, the specification and extension of the decree are given leave to be entirely free. So Voetius writes,

> God understands, wills, and decrees immediatey by his essence, and is terminated freely toward creatures…neither in himself does he produce new actions of intellect and will, which would be accidents distinct from his substance. There merely accedes some external denomination and respect of reason, with which the essence of God by the mode of understanding, loving, decreeing is referred to the thing understood, loved, and decreed.[655]

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[654] Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 16, p. 141. The appeal to 'hyperphysicality' is not a matter of disguising logical contradiction in order to salvage a theological claim. It is, in this case, a recognition that the manner of the divine action transcends the normal dynamics of creaturely natures and actions. In a different context, Turretin, for example, writes in his critique of the Lutheran view of the ubiquity of Christ's humanity that a true hyperphysical characterization does not 'destroy' nature but rather 'adorns' it (*Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. [Geneva, 1688], XIII, qu. 8, 39, p. 360).

[655] Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, I, pp. 240-1.

God acts in the decree by his own essence and his assumption of a particular reference and termination of the decree does not stipulate a new *actus* or new *actio*; what is new is just the reference or termination itself. The determination of a particular *tendentia* is not a matter of exertion on the part of God and does not entail a possible reduction of God from potentiality to actuality as though one were obligated to choose between reading the specification of the *tendentia* into the *actus purus* and rendering it absolutely necessary or conceding that there is passive potency in God in order to buttress God's freedom. God's assumption of one tendency or habitude *ad creaturas* over another is not a constituent of his own pure act, and that assumption, in which the decree is referred or turned to one set of objects over another, is thus characterized by a liberty of indifference. Thus, beyond the distinction between God himself and the *tendentia* of the decree, the isolation of a certain *tendentia* requiring no new action on God's part and therefore transcending the strictures of God's *actus purus* supplies a deeper theological mooring for the freedom of God to create or not to create the world.[656]

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[656] It is understandable that one should want to defend the immutability and eternity of the act of decreeing and of the specified *respectus* of the decree, and then add just that God by nature is indifferent to creatures, in order to corroborate that God is *actus purus* and yet free in the act of creation (see Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, IV, qu. 2, 13, p. 346; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 3, cap. 1, 21, p. 276). This is important in dispelling the notion of a 'point' at which 'God had not yet determined what he would do' (as in Oliphint, *God with Us*, pp. 250, 254). Yet, the argument is strengthened all the more if the assumption of the tendency of the decree is dislodged altogether from properly impinging on the question of God's actuality. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, then, given the distinction between the act of decreeing and the tendency of the decree, it is precisely because God is *actus purus* and does not require a new *actus* in the specific referral of the decree that his decretive specification is both entirely free and consistent with his simplicity.

iii. The Active Power of God

So far it has been argued that the notion of God as *actus purus* does not obscure God's freedom vis-à-vis creation, but several things must be said at least in passing in an effort to suggest that this notion also does not require that God should do all that he possibly can do *pro nobis* lest he have some residual passive potency.[657] At this point, the distinction between God's *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* (or *actualis*) should not be misunderstood. It is not as though the former entails a passive divine *potentia* while the latter represents an educed and actualized iteration of the divine *potentia*. The two are in fact really identical with one another and with the divine essence. The former is simply God's essence under the aspect of power as that by which God simply and absolutely is capable of all things which simply and absolutely are possible (see, e.g., Mt. 3:9; 26:53), while the latter is simply God's essence under the aspect of power as that by which God enacts his decretive will.[658]

As the divine essence itself, the power of God is eternally in act and thus not reducible from passive potency to actuality as though God would need to do all that he might do *pro nobis* in order to maintain the integrity of his actuality. Indeed, because God acts in creation and providence *per nutum merum* (1 Sam 14:6; Ps. 33:6, 9; 148:5; Isa. 40:18-26; Rom. 4:17; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 11:3), his economic action is not a matter of

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[657] *Pace* Richards, *Untamed God*, p. 234.

[658] Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 3, cap. 1, p. 215. Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 29, p. 186.

exertion or a contraction of his power.[659] Thus, the *power itself* remains the same even as

the *demonstration of the power* is delimited by the divine *volitio* and *nolitio* about

creatures.[660] Finally, the infinite actuality of God's power is established 'neither merely

from the perfection of the operating, as far as it operates by a beck [*nutu*], whatever it

operates…but also from the object…as far as it extends itself to all possibles', for 'power

is not lacking to God with which he can produce, if to exist is not repugnant to things.'[661]

That is, it is not as though the power of God is unconnected or detached from certain

possibilia; God's power is actively adequated to all possible things, whether he chooses

to bring them into existence or not. In sum, then, the identity of God's power with his

own essence, the manner of divine action, and the infinite objective extension of God's

power confirm that he need not multiply his created works in order to remain *actus purus*.

iv.   Accidents, Relative Attributes, and the *Relatio Mixta*

The final question to be addressed in this section is whether the real identity of

God's essence and attributes, including attributes such as Creator, Lord, mercy, and so

on, undermines God's freedom in the act of creation. For, if the relative attributes, which

presuppose the existence of the creature, are really identical to God's essence, then it

appears that these are necessarily in God at the cost of his liberty not to create the

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[659] These considerations are not weighed in Mullins, 'Simply Impossible', p. 195, where the author assumes that the bearing of God's *omnipotentia* on creation is a matter of its reduction to actuality.

[660] Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:25. Compare Alsted, *Theologia Naturalis*, pars prior, cap. 133, p. 126, where the author parses the power of God as his power *in Deo* or *a priori* and his power *extra se* or *a posteriori*.

[661] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 20, 14, p. 211.

world.[662] In response to this quandary, Richards proposes that there is potential in God

and that there are accidents in God 'as a result of his free choices'. He writes that,

Aristotle (and, derivatively, Thomas) holds that 'the movement from potency to act and

essence to accident is how individuals who share a common essence are individuated'

and thus that '[t]o have accidents in this sense would be to be one contingent individual

who instantiates a generic common or "kind" essence.' This conception of potentiality

prevents Thomas from coherently expounding God's freedom to create or not to create.[663]

However, Richards judges, it also means that Thomas and Richards' version of

'contemporary essentialism' are not directly in conflict. For Richards' institution of

potentiality in God entails only that 'God exists with countless possibilities, that is,

unactualized possibilities, which are just those things he could choose to do but does not.'

In other words, '[God's] essential freedom is the source of his potentiality and

contingency.' On this account, accidents in God are 'contingent relations' or 'contingent

properties' and, again, Thomas and 'contemporary essentialism' are not directly at odds.

For, according to Richards, Thomas opposes accidents in God 'to forestall the suggestion

that such things as goodness, justice, and wisdom are merely divine qualities', because

this would 'imply that God merely participates in his perfections'. But 'the essentialist

happily concurs with this.' This concurrence, in Richards' mind, is achieved by the

affirmation that God 'necessarily exemplifies' each of his perfections and by the

clarification that the divine perfections are not among the accidents that God does have.

Further, none of this suggests that God is dependent upon his properties (whether

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[662] See Richards, *Untamed God*, p. 235.
[663] Hughes (*On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, pp. 41-50, 149-50) also writes that Thomas' account of potentiality is 'idiosyncratically broad'.

essential or accidental) because, in Richards' view, properties are 'simply facts or truths about an entity'.[664]

En route to an alternative account of the manner in which the real identity of God's essence and God's relative attributes does not overturn God's freedom in creation, several things may be said against Richards' proposal. First, Richards truncates and so misjudges the problem with attributing potentiality to God when he claims that the only liability to be avoided is that of God being individuated within a common essence. While such individuation is indeed worth avoiding, there is still the problem of implying that God is somehow actuated by the creature. On the one hand, if the attribution of potentiality to God aims only to underscore his freedom to create or not to create the world, then this is, in a sense, unobjectionable. On the other hand, however, this attribution of potentiality needlessly introduces confusion by (perhaps inadvertently) intimating that God is brought into a more mature state of activity by his *actio ad extra*, which both deprecates the absolute, prevenient fullness and comprehensiveness of his own immanent *actus essendi* and at the same time allows the creature to hypertrophy into something able to actualize and determine God's being. To the extent, then, that an alternative account of the real identity of God's essence and attributes in relation to God's freedom is available, it ought to be preferred to the attribution of potentiality to God.

Second, Richards truncates and misjudges the problem with attributing accidents to God when he restricts the problem to the liability of God's perfections being inhering qualities in which he must participate. The difficulty with Richards' assessment of the matter is twofold and, as it happens, discloses that his intended rapprochement with

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[664] Richards, *Untamed God*, pp. 225-6, 232-40.

Thomas is illusory. First, Richards attempts to ward off the divine perfections being

accidents in God by the assertion that God 'necessarily exemplifies' each of his

perfections. However, this is still to characterize God's perfections as inhering qualities

and thus as accidents in the strict sense (even if *accidentia propria*) and also to render

God *ens per participationem* insofar as properties other than himself would facilitate his

being what he is. Further, the statement of necessary 'exemplification' implies the aseity

or ultimacy of modality as though the necessity of God being holy, good, and so on need

not be rooted in the very structure of his being and secured by the real identity of his

essence, existence, and perfections.[665] Second, the potency ascribed to God in Richards'

proposal is commandeered so that the accidents or 'relational properties' acquired by God

are not mere 'Cambridge properties' but rather 'real but contingent properties'. He

writes, 'relational properties, such as God creating the actual world and the Word uniting

with human nature in Christ…are clearly not extrinsic in the mere Cambridge sense'.[666]

The positive import of this comment is somewhat opaque, but it seems to entail that by

the accrual of these accidents God undergoes actualization and change. Thus, what

initially presents itself as a benign way of accentuating the freedom of God and

contingency of creation conduces to a divine becoming that destabilizes God's eternal

plenitude and immutability.[667]

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[665] See again the diagnoses of Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, pp. 1-12; Dolezal, *God without Parts*, pp. 143-44n50.
[666] Richards, *Untamed God*, p. 235.
[667] As in the previous material on God's immutability and infinity and in subsequent discussion of whether God as *actus purus* is still free in the act of creation, one must avoid suggesting that God can in any way be brought to actuality or augmented by his action *pro nobis*. Otherwise, the plenitude of God and the gratuity of the creature are diminished.

At this juncture, the absolute-relative distinction in the doctrine of the divine attributes offers a less problematic way forward in which one need not choose between the forefeiture of God's *libertas indifferentiae* toward creatures, on the one hand, or the presence of potentiality in God, on the other hand, both of which paths ultimately ascribe to the creature a capacity to affect God's being. The absolute attributes 'belong to God from eternity and without respect of creatures', while the relative 'belong to God in time with some relation toward creatures'.[668] The former are identical to God's essence considered absolutely (though still under diverse aspects), while the latter are identical to God's essence considered in relation to the creature under some aspect or creaturely circumstance. God does not undergo change so as to accrue the relative attributes as accidents; rather, the creature undergoes change, taking up a new relation to God and thus meeting the same divine essence in new ways. For example, the absolute attribute of love is not enlarged to include mercy; rather, the creature enters a pitiable state and then begins to encounter the love of God as mercy.

Such description of the relative attributes hinges on the belief that the God-world relation is an asymmetrical *relatio mixta*. Such a *relatio mixta* occurs 'whenever two extremes are not of one order'. For example, sensible or intelligible things are not ordered to or determined by the sensing or understanding of human subjects even as sensing and understanding are ordered to and determined by sensible and intelligible things. Hence, 'Because…God is outside the whole order of the creature, and all creatures are ordered to himself, and not the reverse, it is manifest that creatures really are referred to God himself, but there is not in God some real relation of him to creatures

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[668] Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 32, p. 192.

but according to reason only, insofar as creatures are referred to himself.'[669] Again, because God is 'always remaining the same and always existing outside the order of creatures, not otherwise is he referred to them, except insofar as creatures are referred to himself'.[670] Of course, because there are two real terms involved here – God and the creature – this *relatio* in a sense may be called a real relation.[671] Yet, while there are two real extremes here, God's essence implies no relation to the creature, so there is no *necessaria connexio* to the creature, and in this sense the *relatio* is a *relatio rationis ex parte Dei*.[672] God has no natural inclination toward the creature and thus he is not determined or defined by the creature as by a correlate.[673] This lack of correlative reciprocity on God's part is grounded in the immanent or self-referential and eternal determinacy of his plenitude and in his attendant freedom to create or not to create the world as described and defended above.

There is of course a difference between the column around which things move in Thomas' well-known example of a *relatio mixta* and God in relation to the creature. That difference lies in the fact that, while the column is entirely passive and stagnant, God is the living and active God. He does not begin to be ideally related to creatures who come into being independently but rather himself causes them to be and then acts in history to

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[669] Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 7, corp., p. 153.
[670] Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 6, p. 265.
[671] So Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 5, pp. 261-2; Turretin *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, V, qu. 1, 11, p. 476
[672] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 13, p. 212; IV, qu. 2, 13, p. 346. Thus, the character of the *relatio rationis* is easily misunderstood, as in Mullins, 'Simply Impossible', p. 200.
[673] On the ontic and definitional mutuality formally included in real relation, see Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 28, art. 1, corp., p. 318; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 5, pp. 260, 262. Such mutuality holds for *transcendentalis relatio realis* (as in the case of the divine persons) as well as *praedicamentalis relatio realis*.

shape their circumstances. On the surface, this appears to complicate the claim that God is only ideally related to creatures, but the apparent complication resolves when one notes that the divine essence is eternally in act and already established as what it is irrespective of any *actio Dei ad extra*. What God is is not at all determined by what he does toward creatures. Further, God does not act by exertion or a new *actus* in the *actio Dei ad extra* but only *per nutum* (Ps. 33:6; 148:5). Accordingly, even the divine *operatio* (if one were to draw even just a rational distinction between *essentia* and *operatio* in God) is not raised to act or determined by the *actio ad extra*. Indeed, as argued above, the root of the *actio Dei ad extra*, the decretive *tendentia* toward creatures, is not identical to the divine essence and is thus entirely free. Moreover, even the assumption of the *tendentia* is not to be translated into God's *actus purus* because it is not a new *actus* on God's part (in which case it would be translated into the *actus purus* in order to uphold God's pure actuality) but rather a mere referring of God's *actus purus* toward creatures. Any given *tendentia* and the isolation of any given *tendentia* are thus given leave to be entirely free and contingent, corroborating God's ideal relation to creatures. In this way, the intrinsic determinacy and independence of God's essence along with the dynamics of God's decretive will and outward action enable us to retain that God is not intrinsically ordered to creatures even as he is the one who creates and acts in the world.[674] On the question of God's relative attributes in relation to his essence, this means that, while such attributes are really identical to his essence, they are identical with the essence only as it is considered relatively or in relation to the creature. On the one hand, then, these attributes are not accidents that inhere in God. On the other hand, because they are concomitants of

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[674] Thus God is truly both *actus purus* and the Creator who acts *pro nobis* (*pace* Smith, *Oneness and Simplicity of God*, pp. 70-1).

a logical and free relation, the relative attributes are not necessary but truly free, just as creatures themselves are truly contingent.

In this section one of the most poignant objections to divine simplicity has been examined and met from several vantage points. In contrast to various treatments in recent analytic philosophy, it has been maintained that the notion of God as *actus purus* and the *libertas indifferentiae* of God with regard to creation are compatible with one another. This has been argued via expositions of God's decretive will and power and by an account of God's relative attributes and of the *relatio mixta* between God and creatures. In the end, ineradicable mystery prevents us from circumscribing the interiority of God's being, and this ought not to be lamented but rather embraced as a salutary humbling and relativization of human reason. Nevertheless, in view of the importance of theological coherence in Christian dogmatics, the statements of this section are offered in order to clarify that the doctrine of divine simplicity comports with the freedom of God and the contingency of creation. In the next and final section of this chapter, the coherence of divine simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity comes under consideration.

C. Divine Simplicity and the Trinity

i. Tensions in Recent Analyses

In both theological and philosophical circles there are significant doubts as to whether God's simplicity resonates with the distinctions that must be made in

expounding the doctrine of the Trinity. In Barth's doctrine of the Trinity one finds a characterization of the divine persons as *modi subsistendi* of the one divine essence coupled with criticism of the theological concept of *persona* absorbing modern notions of 'personality'. For Barth, the persons are repetitions of the one essence, including the one intellect and will, and emphatically not 'three departments of the divine essence and operation'.[675] However, with more recent thinkers such as Moltmann and Gunton this characterization of the persons is brought under criticism. For Moltmann, while reaction against the modern notion of a person as an autonomous individual is understandable, 'if the subjectivity of acting and receiving is transferred from the three divine Persons to the one divine subject, then the three Persons are bound to be degraded to modes of being, or modes of subsistence, of the one identical subject….The result would be to transfer the subjectivity of action to a deity concealed "behind" the three Persons.' 'But who then should that absolute personality be *in* whom the three modes of being manifest themselves and who constitutes himself in three modes of being?' According to Moltmann, 'this is a late triumph for the Sabellian modalism which the early church condemned.'[676] In his own constructive account, Moltmann seeks to integrate Augustinian and Boethian definitions of 'person' with the concept of perichoresis. On the one hand, in view of the biblical depiction of redemptive history, the persons are not mere relations. Indeed, the existence of each of the persons is presupposed in any discussion of relation. On the other hand, the persons are always in relation and are constituted by their relations to one another. There are, therefore, three subjects in the

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[675] Barth, *CD*, II/1, pp. 349-61. In this connection, one might mention Karl Rahner's doctrine of the Trinity as well.

[676] Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, pp. 139, 143.

Trinity, but these three subjects are not antecedently individuals detached from one another. They are, rather, three who always exist in perichoretic fellowship.[677] Similarly, Gunton opines that Augustine's description of the persons as relations entails that the persons 'lack distinguishable identity' and therefore 'tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God'. In pursuit of a framework that honors 'the seriousness with which the Bible expresses the unity and diversity of God's action' and hence to 'the being of the particular persons', Gunton follows the theory developed by Zizioulas that the Cappadocian theologians achieved a 'new ontology' by prioritizing the concept of person in the doctrine of God and thereby bringing to light the genuine uniqueness and particularity of each person over against the construal of the persons as subsisting relations. At the same time, that uniqueness and particularity, Gunton writes, 'derive from the relations to others'.[678] Though much more might be said about modern developments in trinitarian theology, such samplings illustrate a prominent contemporary conviction that articulations of the doctrine of God of the sort in which divine simplicity figures positively, and in which the persons are typically characterized as modes of subsisting or subsisting relations, inevitably obscure the interpersonal communion and action of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

This sentiment is present in philosophical explorations in trinitarianism as well. In the realm of analytic philosophical theology, there is no shortage of new attempts to demonstrate the logical consistency and coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity.[679] Not all of these proposals stand at odds with traditional formulations of divine simplicity or

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[677] Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, pp. 171-6.
[678] Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, pp. 39, 42, 93-6.
[679] For a helpful survey of the work being done, see McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?*, pp. 11-55.

the doctrine of the Trinity, but some do present challenges. For example, in Moreland and Craig's treatment of the Trinity, they adduce the divine persons' use of 'personal indexicals' and, in particular, first-person plural pronouns in Scripture to make the case that the persons are 'three distinct, self-conscious individuals'. Claiming the support of theologians such as Tertullian, Athanasius, and Hilary, and insisting that it is not anachronism to call them 'social trinitarians', Moreland and Craig state that 'in God there are three distinct centers of self-consciousness, each with its proper intellect and will.' In other words, 'God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood.' Aware of the implication that there are then three knowing and willing persons and then a knowing and willing God or triune whole back of them, they simply repudiate this implication and reason that there are 'two ways to be divine': 'while the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole that is properly God.' This, they urge, is not to disparage the status of the persons. In fact, on any account, the persons cannot be positioned to 'instantiate the divine nature' and thus be 'properly God', '[f]or presumably *being triune* is a property of the divine nature (God does not just happen to be triune); yet the persons of the Trinity do not have that property.' At any rate, 'if the persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of being instances of the divine nature', 'we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God.' Indeed, 'it seems undeniable that there is some sort of part-whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.' Yet, 'far from downgrading the divinity of the persons, such an account can be very illuminating of their contribution to the divine nature.' This illumination, Moreland and Craig suggest, lies in that, while the persons are seen to have

properties such as necessity, aseity, and eternity 'because God as a whole has them', God is seen to have properties such as omniscience and omnipotence 'because the persons do'. While they acknowledge that this view conflicts with the identity of each person with God in the Athanasian Creed (*Ita deus Pater: deus Filius; deus* [*et*] *Spiritus Sanctus*[680]), they insist that the judgments enshrined in the Creed are wrongly beholden to the doctrine of divine simplicity and perilously entail the identity of the persons with one another. Appealing to readers' Protestant sensibilities, Moreland and Craig reason, 'Nothing in Scripture warrants us in thinking that God is simple and that each person of the Trinity is identical to the whole Trinity.' In their assessment of the coherence of Thomas' doctrine of divine simplicity and his doctrine of the Trinity, these are 'doubtless inconsistent': 'Intuitively, it seems obvious that a being that is absolutely without composition and transcends all distinctions cannot have real relations subsisting within it, much less be three distinct persons.' With divine simplicity, each person must be identical with the essence, '[b]ut if two things are identical with some third thing, they are identical with each other. Therefore, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be distinct persons or relations.' In addition, 'it can safely be said that on no reasonable understanding of *person* can a person be equated with a relation. Relations do not cause things, know truths or love people in the way the Bible says God does.'[681]

In line with certain theological reservations about divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity, Moreland and Craig exemplify at least one strand of contemporary philosophical theology in which, in light of the biblical portrayal of God's personal

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[680] Athanasian Creed, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 15, p. 67.
[681] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 580, 583, 586-7, 590-4.

action, the divine persons are regarded as persons each of whom has his own distinct intellect and will and is not merely a distinct mode of subsisting or a subsisting relation within the Godhead. Of course, Moreland and Craig go further in endeavoring to render this positive claim logically and conceptually plausible. They also exemplify for us the belief that, even if only modal or relative distinctions were to be granted among the persons, divine simplicity would still be inconsistent with the multiplicity of persons.

In view of these representative criticisms from theologians and philosophers skeptical of divine simplicity, this section provides a threefold response. First, it is argued that the biblical text does not teach or implicitly compel the theologoumenon of three distinct 'sets of faculties' in the persons and that the singularity of God's intellect and will in the older theology still suffices in the doctrine of the Trinity. Second, it is contended that there are serious theological and logical problems with the kind of elaboration found in Moreland and Craig's handling of the issues. Third, and finally, having signaled the ongoing viability of the modal distinctions among the Father, Son, and Spirit, the section closes with an exposition of the coherence of divine simplicity with such distinctions in the Godhead.

ii.   Biblical Exegesis and the Personhood of the Persons

A number of passages, particularly in the Gospels, display the interaction of the Father, Son, and Spirit and are pertinent to the question of whether each of the divine persons must have his own intellect and will. At the Lord's baptism, for example, Christ enters the waters of the Jordan, while the Spirit of God descends upon Christ and the

Father from heaven speaks the words of paternal affirmation: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Mt. 3:13-17). Immediately the Spirit then 'drives' Christ into the wilderness (Mk. 1:12). In the bread of life discourse, Jesus teaches that the Father has given a people to him and that he has descended to do the will of his Father in keeping that people and raising them up on the last day (Jn. 6:35-40). In the upper room discourse, there are several references to the missions of the persons, in which one of the persons (or, in some descriptions of the sending of the Spirit, two of the persons) sends another into economic action (Jn. 14:15-16:24). The prayers of Jesus supply other textual loci on the basis of which a distinct intellect and will in each person might be posited. In the upper room, Jesus speaks of a glory shared by the Father and Son before the founding of the world (Jn. 17:5). He speaks of the Father's love for him, a love that precedes the sending of the Son into the world (17:24). Clearly, then, the Father and Son exist in communion with one another even apart from the economy. Christ's prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane are especially poignant. He asks that the Father allow the cup of suffering to pass from him but adds, 'Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will' (Mt. 26:39).

The interaction of the three persons is attested in the New Testament epistles as well. In Romans 8, for example, God sends the Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' to condemn sin and free sinners (8:3), while the Spirit helps believers in their weakness by interceding for them according to the will of God (8:26-27). In 1 Corinthians 15 Christ is said in the end to deliver the kingdom over to the Father (15:24). Having brought all things into subjection to himself, the Son then subjects himself to God the Father 'that God may be all in all' (15:28). Before the foundation of the world God chose believers

'in Christ' (Eph. 1:4). Prior to his incarnation, the Son chose not to 'grasp' the splendor

of Godhead unobstructed by the veil of human nature and suffering and so assumed a

human nature in conjunction with his (unaltered) divine nature (Phil. 2:6-7). In Hebrews

1, the Father creates the world through the Son and appoints him to be heir of all things

(1:2). The Son is 'the radiance of his glory and representation of his *hypostasis*' (1:3).

The Father also deems the Son to be the everlasting king and then ascribes to him the

work of creation (1:5-13). Later in Hebrews Christ offers himself as a sacrifice to God

and sits at the right hand of God (e.g., 10:1-18). While this is certainly not an exhaustive

survey of passages that might be adduced in favor of there being three intellects and wills

in God, this selection of texts shores up the exegetical considerations to be addressed

here.

In some of these passages, one may attribute the starkness of the interactivity of

the Father and Son to the Son's having a human nature and human will. Perhaps the most

obvious example of this is the prayer in Gethsemane. Commenting on Jesus weeping and

on this prayer in Gethsemane, Athanasius, for example, reasons that, when Christ

petitioned that the cup might pass from him, the fear did not belong to his deity, for 'this

passion too was proper [ἴδιον] to his humanity.' For Christ himself is Lord over death,

striking fear into the 'keepers of hades' and causing them to open hades and release the

bodies of the saints (see Mt. 27:52-53).[682] Therefore, if such willing belongs to the

human nature of Christ, the passage does not furnish an argument for distinct *divine*

intellects and wills in the divine persons. Passages broaching the pre-economic

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[682] Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos*, III, 56, pp. 440-1. Cf. Stephen R. Holmes, 'Three Versus One? Some Problems of Social Trinitarianism', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009), p. 88.

interactivity of the Father and Son are more promising, not least those in which we

encounter the personal pre-incarnate existence of the Son (e.g., Jn. 1:1; 8:58; 17:5; Phil.

2:6-7) and glimpse textual foundations for the concept of the *pactum salutis* (e.g., Jn.

6:35-40; Eph. 1:4). Alongside these are the texts in which the Holy Spirit, who has never

assumed a human nature with a human will, is shown to interact with the other persons

(e.g., Mk. 1:12; Rom. 8:26-27).

However, before one concludes that these passages inexorably conduct the reader

to an affirmation of three distinct intellects and wills in the divine persons, another thread

of exegetical reasoning should be considered. By Holy Scripture itself we are apprised of

the unity and singularity of God and of the divine essence or nature, and, given the

textual presence of terminology such as *theiotēs* (Rom. 1:20), *physis* (Gal. 4:8), and

theotēs (Col. 2:9), to take up this manner of speaking is no flight to 'Greek philosophy'.

By Scripture itself we are likewise given a number of divine attributes (truth, life,

holiness, goodness, and so on) and told that such are what renders[683] God what he is and

thus by implication are included in the divine nature. For example, over against the idols,

it belongs to God as such that he should know what is to come (Isa. 41:21-24; 44:6-8). It

belongs to God as such that he is true and living (Jer. 10). It belongs to God as such that

he infallibly accomplishes what he pleases (Ps. 115:2-8; Isa. 46:8-12). Though the

biblical authors did not write with a technical metaphysics or doctrine of the divine

attributes in hand, such passages do underwrite the traditional patterns of judgment

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[683] The language is carefully chosen here, for it would be perilous to suggest that there is
something that 'causes' God to be what he is. Thus, here it is said that these attributes
'render' God what he is, and the unseemly inference that there is then something besides
God that renders God what he is is dispelled precisely by affirming the doctrine of divine
simplicity.

exhibited from patristic theology onward holding that knowledge, truth, will, life, holiness, goodness, and the rest are proper to God's nature. It must be asked, then, why one would begin to apportion these, and, by implication, apportion or componentially distribute the divine essence, to the three persons. The equality of the persons (Jn. 5:16-29; 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:10-12) coupled with 'all the fullness' of the essence dwelling in the Son in Colossians 2:9 implies that the whole essence is in each of the persons and thus that each attribute in its singularity is shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit.

From here, it should then be asked whether the attributes of knowledge and will, *notae personalitatis*, being ascribed to the singular essence in the persons rather than to the idiomatic distinctness of the persons conflicts with the communion and interaction of the three portrayed in Holy Scripture.[684] Under the pressure of the numerical unity of the essence and the implicit singularity of each attribute (including intellect and will) in Scripture itself, it seems fitting to maintain that the Father, Son, and Spirit share the one essence and thus the one personality of God.[685] Yet each has or really is the divine essence and personality *in his own peculiar manner*. Thus, without compromising the numerical unity of the essence and attributes, one can affirm that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each emphatically personal – not just *modi subsistendi* but *modi subsistendi*

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[684] It is not that there is an essence that lies back of the persons as a fourth in a quaternity but rather that the essence subsists only in and as the persons. Thus, the claim made here is only that these attributes belong to (and indeed really are) the essence, not the persons *qua* modes, who nevertheless have and are the essence and these attributes as distinct modes of subsisting of the essence.

[685] It is permissible to speak of 'personality' in the abstract as to intellect and will with reference to God in his oneness, but, as a matter of contentment with analogy and deference to catholic terminology, it is best to continue to speak of the Father, Son, and Spirit as three 'persons'. Further, the subsisting *per se* of each, as noted below, makes the plural *personae* a suitable theologoumenon.

personales – and, modifying the divine essence and personality in diverse ways, are in this sense fit for personal communion with one another. To be sure, such an analogical account of personal communion and interaction will not satisfy all the intuitions about I-Thou relations in twentieth- and twenty-first-century trinitarianism, but, given the express and implicit scriptural testimony to the unity of God in his intellect and will and to the Creator-creature distinction that has cultivated an analogical modesty running through historic expositions of the Christian doctrine of God, perhaps an analogical account of triune communion ought not to appear so unusual. Given the fact that the scriptural texts indicating the pre-incarnate personal existence of the Word and the eternity and personality of the Spirit do not divulge any mechanics of this personal existence, along with the fact that there are exegetical reasons to affirm the singularity of God's intellect and will, it is fitting to maintain that the persons share the one intellect, will, and personality of God and modify the same in different ways. On an analogical reading of triune communion, the Father, Son, and Spirit share the one divine intellect and will included in God's essence and hence are personal *ousiōdōs*, not *hypostatikōs*. Yet they are indeed ineradicably personal, and as *modi subsistendi personales* objectively distinct from one another they may be said to abide in communion with one another. To make these claims is of course to make peace with the presence of mystery in the doctrine of the Trinity, but, in light of the incomprehensibility of the subject matter and the biblical presentation of the unity of the divine essence and the essential and thus singular divine intellect and will, this approach is to be preferred over an hypostatic allocation and tripling of the intellect and will to the three persons.

In addition to a clear exegetical impetus and verification, an analogical rendition of triune interaction also enjoys a rich continuity with the church's historic trinitarian teaching. Indeed, it is argued here that this account is but a gathering up of what mainstream voices in the tradition have already said. While a close analysis of the particular emphases and contributions of each individual voice lies beyond the scope of the present work, there are two counterbalancing themes in the broad tapestry of trinitarian doctrine that must be observed. On the one hand, the attributes of intellect, will, and power, and thus the divine subjectivity and agency, are regarded as singular. While Hilary, for example, contends vigorously that the Father is not *solitarius Deus* and that there is one *ex quo* are all things (the Father) and one *per quem* are all things (the Son) (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6), he contends just as vigorously on the basis of John 10:30 that there is but one divine nature in the Father and the Son (*in Deo et Deo*) and that the Father and Son are of *unius indifferentis naturae*. Hilary indicates too that the divine knowledge, wisdom, will, and power belong to that one Godhead, implicitly disavowing any notion of 'three sets of faculties'.[686]

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[686] Hilary, *De Trinitate*, lib. 3, 23, pp. 91-2; lib. 4, 6, p. 99; 9, p. 102; 17, pp. 110-11; lib. 5, 5, pp. 132-3; 11, pp. 135-6; 35, pp. 153-4; lib. 7, 13, p. 210; 18-19, pp. 213-15; 25-6, pp. 221-2. In light of Hilary's insistence on the indivisible and identical nature of the Father and Son, his comparing the wholeness or sameness of the nature in the Father and Son in relation to the generation of the Son to the wholeness or sameness of the humanity in Mary and Jesus (lib. 3, 19, p. 87), and his talk of the nature of the Son being merely negatively *non externa* or *dissimilis* to that of the Father (lib. 7, 39, p. 232), should not be taken to presuppose a generic or specific divine essence that is triply 'instantiated' by the persons. Rather, these statements appear to be simply less strict in their descriptive deportment. For helpful comments on the unity and simplicity of the divine essence and perfections in each of the persons and on the unity of the operation of the persons in the general field of pro-Nicene thought, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicea and Its Legacy: An*

Similarly, while Gregory of Nyssa evinces some degree of willingness to compare the matter of the divine nature and three divine persons to the matter of human nature and three human persons in *On 'Not Three Gods'*, he firmly upholds the singularity of the divine *operatio*:

> But with the divine nature, we do not learn thus that the Father does something according to himself, unless the Son conjointly works. Or again that the Son operates something peculiarly without the Spirit….On account of this, the name taken from the operating [in Gregory's view, θεότης] is not separated for the multitude of the ones operating, because the action of each about anything is not separate or peculiar, but whatever occurs…occurs through the three, yet three things do not occur….Because…the Holy Trinity operates every operation not separately according to the number of the persons [τῶν ὑποστάσεων], but one movement and arrangement of good will occurs, from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. For, as we do not call three givers of life the ones operating one life…nor do we announce all the other things plurally. Thus nor can we name three Gods, who operate, conjointly and inseparably through one another, this divine and overseeing power and operating toward us and every creature.[687]

Strikingly, then, for Gregory, the hypostatic allocation and tripling of the divine *operatio* and divine attributes entails a postulation of three deities.

Likewise, John of Damascus comments that in the three persons there is 'one essence, one goodness, one power, one will, one energy, one authority' as the three dwell in perichoretic unity. Hence the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in all respects, except those of not being begotten [τῆς ἀγεννησίας], being begotten [τῆς γεννήσεως], and procession [τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως]. In view of John 14:11 ('I am in the Father, and the Father

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Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 278-82, 286-300.

[687] Gregory of Nyssa, *Quod Non Sint Tres Dii, ad Ablabium*, in vol. 45 of *PG* (Paris, 1863), pp. 125-8. One need not concur with Gregory on every point of this work in order to see the point made here, namely, that even one so highly regarded among proponents of so-called 'social trinitarianism' does not multiply the traditionally common divine attributes.

in me'), there is no difference [διαφορὰν] as to 'will or judgment or operation or power' among the three, all of which facilitate 'division' [διαίρεσιν] among creatures. Against the theological διαίρεσις of Arian teaching, the Father, Son, and Spirit, 'in whom the deity is', or, better, 'who are the deity', enjoy 'one and the same [τὸ ἕν, και ταυτὸν] movement and will of deity' and 'identity [ταυτότητα] of essence and power and operation and lordship'. Emphatically, John writes, 'I do not say similarity [ὁμοιότητα] but identity [ταυτότητα].'[688] While these references to but three patristic theologians certainly do not constitute a detailed study of the full history of catholic or mainstream trinitarian thought, they are representive of that catholic mainstream. It should be clear that these are the statements of theologians positing not merely a generic or specific unity among the persons but rather a singularity or numerical identity of essence and essential attributes, including knowledge, will, and power. It should be equally clear that such authors cannot be registered as 'social trinitarians' venturing three sets of faculties in the persons.

On the other hand, the persons remain indelibly personal and objectively distinct from one another, each expressing the divine subjectivity in his own manner. Hence Gregory of Nyssa writes that 'every operation extending from God to the creation…originates from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.'[689] Reflecting on Gregory's conception of the personhood of the persons, Khaled Anatolios helpfully cautions against 'too facile an assimilation of Gregory to a so-

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[688] John of Damascus, *Expositio de Fide Orthodoxa*, lib. 1, cap. 8, pp. 828-9.
[689] Gregory of Nyssa, *Quod Non Sint Tres Dii*, p. 125.

called "social model" of the Trinity and, on the other hand, a categorical rejection of all

"personalist" elements in Gregory's conception of the divine *hypostaseis*'. 'While

Gregory clarifies…that there is one movement of will that encompasses divine being, he is

equally clear…that this one movement is appropriated by all three *hypostaseis* such that

each becomes the subject of the divine will, agency, and power.'[690] Anatolios writes,

> The notion of separate agencies resulting in distinct actions, however intimately
> co-operative…is ruled out. But the notion of an altogether undifferentiated
> agency in which each of the persons partakes in exactly the same manner is also
> implicitly but very clearly ruled out by Gregory's consistent strategy of using
> three different verbs to distribute the common action distinctly to the three
> persons….[T]he typical pattern for that distribution is that every action issues
> from the Father, is actualized through the Son, and is completed by the Spirit.
> There is thus an ineffable distinction within unity in the divine co-activity such
> that the one divine activity is completely effected by each of the persons and yet
> is distinctly inflected between them.[691]

This threefold hypostatic 'inflection' of the singular personality and personal action of

the one God is precisely what an analogical account of the personhood of the persons and

of the communion and interactivity of the persons aims to catch up and elucidate.[692] The

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[690] Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), pp. 219-20.

[691] Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, p. 229.

[692] It may be added that, while the discussion thus far has predominantly had in view the transitive acts of God (those which have a term or object outside of God), the personal action wrought by the persons and thereby displaying their personhood includes the immanent acts of God (those without a term or object extrinsic to God) in which, for example, God knows all things knowable or decretively wills that which will come to pass in creation. In other words, the personhood of the persons seen in personal action is eternal. Yet, unlike the *actio ad extra*, which is said to be undivided and thus clearly conforms to the singularity of the personal attributes of the persons, the *actio ad intra* is ramified into that which is essential (which the persons prosecute by the essence as a common *principium*) and that which is personal (which the persons individually prosecute with respect to one another). *Prima facie*, the latter appears to be in tension with the notion of the singularity of the personal attributes of the persons. However, even in the *actio ad intra personalis*, wherein one person is the *terminus a quo* and another the

persons are in Scripture and in traditional trinitarian theology undoubtedly personal, but

they are such, not by hypostatic *idiomata*, but by the very divinity which they modify.

They are in communion and interaction, not by a multiplication of personal faculties, but

by the relative diversity of their modification of the essence.[693] Thus, the phrase *modi*

subsistendi personales emerges as a suitable descriptor for the Father, Son, and Spirit. In

light of the fact that the biblical text arguably runs contrary to the postulation of three

divine subjectivities or 'sets of faculties' as well as the (subsidiary) fact that the church's

tradition favors an analogical rendition of triune communion and interaction in which the

persons are distinct from one another only *ad invicem,* it seems fitting to conclude that

the triune communion and interaction, properly understood, does not militate against the

doctrine of divine simplicity.

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terminus ad quem, the singular essence and essential attributes continue to be the
principium quo of the action, though not the essence taken absolutely but operating
secundum relationem. Therefore, even as the personhood and personal action of the
persons are eternal, the personal attributes are not tripled. See Thomas, *ST,* Ia, qu. 41, art.
5, p. 430; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 4, cap. 2, pp. 236-7.
[693] Gilles Emery notes that Thomas sets aside Augustine's view of 'person' as properly
an 'absolute name' somewhat arbitrarily chosen to designate the three. Thomas favors the
Boethian definition of 'person' as *rationalis naturae individua substantia* (see *Summa*
Theologiae, Ia, qu. 29, art. 1, pp. 327-8; qu. 30, art. 1, p. 341). Yet, as Emery observes
(*The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy [Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2007], pp. 111, 115, 117, 119), while the persons are, in
Thomas' view, subsistences of the personal divine essence and thus duly described as
'persons', the term 'person' is applied analogically to God so that the 'principle of
distinction' or 'mode of individuation' is just the relation of origin in God. Hence,
without glossing over the differences between Augustine and Thomas, one can say (in
keeping with Thomas' emphasis) that, in a sense, the three persons are rightly called
'persons' according to the Boethian definition and yet also say (in keeping with
Augustine's emphasis, and not necessarily entirely against Thomas) that, in another
sense, personhood applies to God absolutely and in his unity. On the one hand, the
Father, Son, and Spirit are rightly called 'persons' because they are incommunicable
subsistences of a personal essence; on the other hand, the persons are not rational or
agential by that which distinguishes them but by the essence which unifies them.

iii.   Problems with Three Divine Personalities

We turn now to the negative task of identifying problems with the assertion of three subjectivities in God and with the philosophical elaboration offered by Moreland and Craig. While Moltmann inveighs against a 'transfer' of the divine subjectivity to *Deus unus* on the ground that this maneuver generates an unidentified 'absolute personality' lurking behind the three persons, it is arguably the tripling of the divine personality that represents a novel dislocation of the same and that produces a God-behind-God scenario. Insofar as Scripture itself and the church fathers, even those who clearly oppose Sabellianism, include the intellect, will, and power in that which is absolute in God and is common to the three, the hypostatic allocation of the divine personality appears to be the approach that truly executes a 'transfer' or revisionist treatment of the divine personality. Further, though this distributive move is, in Moltmann's judgment, calibrated to dispel a *Deus absconditus* back of the Father, Son, and Spirit, the move in fact yields exactly what it purports to avert. For God as one is bereft of his knowing, willing, loving, and acting and what funds the unity of the persons becomes an enigmatic and impersonal deity. Indeed, the reassignment and tripling of these attributes to the three persons entails that the question of *quis* in theology proper is simply not applicable to God as one.[694]

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[694] Muller (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:156) explains that in the organization of the doctrine of God in the development of Reformed theology the question *quis* sometimes included exposition of the common attributes as well as the Trinity of persons (as in Wolfgang Musculus) and at other times confined itself to

Of course, one might stress, as Moltmann does, that it is the perichoresis of the

triune persons that facilitates their unity, and that this duly weds the principle of unity to

the communal life of the three persons so as to avoid the specter of an underlying,

shadowy deity. However, while the notion of perichoresis is sometimes seen as an

alternative to an 'essentialist' conception of the unity of the persons, perichoresis is

actually just an implicate of the identity of the essence in each of the persons. Reflecting

on John 14:10 ('I am in the Father and the Father is in me'), Athanasius, for example,

writes that 'he is in the Father, and the Father in the Son; for the deity of the Son is [the

deity] of the Father, and it is in the Son.'[695] A complementary analysis of the same text

can be found in Hilary, who moors the *circumincessio* in the unity of the essence of the

persons – *Quod in Patre est, hoc et in Filio est* – and in the Father's originating a Son who

is equal in essence to him.[696] In the era of Reformed scholasticism, Owen speaks of the

'mutual in-being of the persons, by reason of their unity in the same substance or

essence'.[697] In short, to attempt to prevent the tripling of the divine subjectivity from

leading to a God-behind-God scenario by way of recourse to the doctrine of perichoresis

would be to misunderstand the inner logic of perichoresis, in which the persons indwell

description of the Trinity (as in Turretin). On the one hand, the markers of personality,
particularly intellect and will, pertain absolutely and singly to God in his essence. On the
other hand, the Father, Son, and Spirit are three *personal* modes of subsisting and are
rightly called *personae*. If this issue is handled clumsily (as in Cornelius Van Til, *An
Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation,
Scripture, and God*, 2nd ed., ed. William Edgar [Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2007],
pp. 362-4, where God is called 'one person' 'even within the ontological Trinity'), it can
easily yield various solecisms in the catholic grammar of trinitarian thought.
[695] Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos*, III, 5, p. 332.
[696] Hilary, *De Trinitate*, lib. 3, 4, p. 78. Compare Barth, *CD*, I/1, p. 370.
[697] Owen, *Doctrine of the Holy Trinity Explained and Vindicated*, p. 408. Cf. Mastricht,
Theoretico-Practica Theologia, lib. 2, cap. 24, 7, p. 238.

one another owing to the singularity and identity of the essence that they share. Even if

the concept of perichoresis were successfully reframed as the sheer 'sociality' of the

persons, this sociality would still function as an underlying, impersonal reality back of

the persons, yielding a God-behind-God scenario.[698]

In contrast, subscribing to the singularity of the personal divine essence and to the

modal distinction between essence and person in God, the advocate of divine simplicity

can affirm, on the one hand, that God as one is personal and, on the other hand, that there

is no *ratio* of the persons' divinity or unity that lies back of them, and hence no God

behind God. For the essence subsists only in and indeed *as* each of the persons.[699]

Strictly speaking, then, the *essentia* is not that *propter quam* the persons are divine and

are one but rather that *secundum quam* the persons are divine and are one. There are no

lines of causality running between *Deus unus* and *Deus trinus* and thus the former can

never be seen as the 'deep' God above or below the latter. Instead, *Deus unus* and *Deus*

trinus alike are simply *Deus*, the former being God under the absolute, essential aspect

and the latter being God under the aspect of the modes of subsisting in relation to one

another.[700]

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[698] One could appeal to the construal of the Father as *archē* in certain accounts of Eastern
orthodox trinitarianism in order to find a personal ground of unity in God. However, as
noted in this study, to portray the Father as *fons deitatis* with respect to the Godhead itself
– rather than just the modes of subsisting of the Godhead – is to enfeeble the *autotheotēs*
and equality of the Son and Spirit.
[699] Compare Bruce L. McCormack, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth: An Attempt
to Reconstruct Barth's Doctrine in the Light of His Later Christology', in Habets and
Tolliday, eds., *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*, pp. 100-1.
[700] Compare Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 5, p. 137. Here *Deus*
is held up as the unifying theme for *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*, while in Polanus

Some of the untoward implications of the tripling of the divine personality are meant to be allayed by the elaboration found in Moreland and Craig, but their elaborative strategy proves difficult to sustain. Moreland and Craig begin by flatly disavowing that their 'Trinity monotheism', in which the persons are 'divine' but 'the Trinity as a whole is properly God' and 'alone is God', produces a quaternity. Yet their exposition of 'two ways to be divine', in which the Trinity as a composite whole is the 'sole instance of the divine nature' while the three persons are 'parts of God', constructs exactly that. The prospect of a quaternity arises whenever it is suggested that the essence and persons are really distinct from one another, entailing four *res* in God, or whenever the essence is regarded as a self-subsistent or an incommunicable that exceeds the persons in God.[701] In the case of Moreland and Craig's proposal, which is essentially a restatement of that of

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deitas is the starting point and is considered either *communiter*, *indistincte*, and *absolute* in God's oneness or *singulariter*, *distincte*, and *relative* in God's threeness.

[701] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 25, 18, 22-24, pp. 298-9. See also Mastricht's mention of the *Tetratheistae* in *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 115; cap. 24, 18, p. 241. Of course, classically, *essentia* is not strictly a *res* but a *principium rei*. A simplicity-shaped account of the Trinity will contend that, on the one hand, the one God considered essentially and absolutely and a given divine person are distinct as *res a modo rei personali* and then that one divine person and another are distinct as *alius modus rei personalis a alio modo rei personali*. Hence there are neither four divine *res* nor even one objectively distinct *principium rei* and three *res*. In an intriguing essay, A. N. Williams ('Does "God" Exist?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 [2005], pp. 48-64) cautions against propping up 'God' as a fourth hypostasis in trinitarian thought. She rightly emphasizes that the divine nature does not lie anywhere 'outside' the persons and that the divine nature does not act anhypostatically. However, because she does not consider the real identity of *deitas* and *Deus* and the real identity of each person with God himself – distinct from God only as *modus a re* – and appears to reject the notion that the persons are personal and agential *secundum deitatem* rather than *secundum propria*, she, not unlike Moreland and Craig, is left to conclude that, strictly speaking, 'God' is not personal and does not act. She perhaps goes further, however, in stipulating that, strictly speaking, 'God' does not exist. It might be said that Williams tries to avoid the peril of a quaternity by construing a would-be fourth as a mere rational and expedient construct, while Moreland and Craig grant objective reality to the fourth but simply baldly deny the presence of a quaternity.

the *Triformiani* recollected by Mastricht,[702] there is an especially crude quaternitarian

configuration – or perhaps even a set of five (essence, Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit) –

in which the essence is really distinct from the persons while the persons no longer even

'instantiate' the essence. In their account, there are, on the one hand, the essence and the

aggregate that is the Trinity which instantiates the essence and, on the other hand, the

distinct persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit which compose the triune aggregate.

Moreland and Craig's contention that there are 'two ways to be divine', and that this

does not denigrate the status of the distinct persons who, in their view, do not

'instantiate' the divine nature and are not properly God, ought to be recognized as the

novel claim that it is. Of course, this is not by itself an argument against the claim, but

they do intimate an established dogmatic rationale for the claim, and such intimation is

based on a misconception. For it is not the case that 'being triune' is a long-time

'property' of the divine nature and that the persons thus cannot 'instantiate' that nature,

lest there be nine within the Godhead. For 'Trinity' is not a property or attribute

registered under the absolute or common aspect of God's being along with holiness,

goodness, and so on. 'Trinity' is, instead, located under the relative aspect of God's

being and is but an acknowledgment or conceptual distillation of the fact that there are

three relatively distinct modes of subsisting in the Godhead. Adrift of a clear exegetical or

theological foundation, Moreland and Craig's approach then requires an untenable

theological mereology in which the whole (purportedly, the Trinity as a composite) is

somehow not greater than the parts (purportedly, the persons as parts of the triune

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[702] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 115; cap. 24, 18, p. 240.

composite) and runs afoul of Colossians 2:9, where 'all the fullness of deity' indwells the Son and, by implication, each of the divine persons, who are *Deus integer*.

Moreover, the suggestion of a dialectical causality running between the divine essence and the divine persons is logically and theologically problematic. The hypostatic *idiomata* which multiply the persons cannot double as properties of the divine essence which unifies the persons.[703] But this is precisely what is claimed when one suggests that something – in the case of Moreland and Craig, the divine intellect, will, and power – may be 'contributed' from the persons as such and subsequently assimilated to the divine essence. In addition, such a conception of causation in God concedes that the divine essence is caused. One might aver that this is an innocuous causality on account of its intra-divine character, but, once a causal interval is introduced between person and essence in God, precisely whether one can still claim that the persons are internal to the divine essence is brought into question.[704]

While Moreland and Craig recognize that an account of the Trinity in which the persons 'contribute' faculties to the essence and are not 'properly' identical with God stands against the trinitarianism enshrined in the Athanasian Creed, they fail to consider whether this account stands against the teaching of Scripture itself as well. In the biblical text, the Father, Son, and Spirit are not merely adjectivally called 'divine' but are in fact

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[703] Matthew Levering (*Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology [Oxford: Blackwell, 2004], pp. 202-12) identifies and critiques such confusion of that which distinguishes and that which unifies the persons in 'theo-ontological' proposals about being as intrinsically relational.

[704] The initial appearance of interiority would seem to be largely a function of the fact that, in the wake of traditional expositions of the Trinity lacking such a notion of causation, the persons would naturally be assumed to be internal to the divine essence, which does not exceed the persons but subsists only in and as the persons.

each identified with the one God. Of course, in John 1:1 the Word is famously called

theos without the article *ho*, prompting orthodox New Testament scholars (rightly) to

clarify that this does not mean that the Word is 'a god' and therefore a lesser god.

Sometimes the additional claim is made that *theos* should be taken 'qualitatively' here

('the Word was divine'), lest one identify the Word with God and thus with the Father

and thereby '[jump] out of the frying pan of Arianism and into the fire of

Sabellianism'.[705] Leaving aside whether the absence of the article in John 1:1 may signal

that the third occurrence of *theos* in the verse should be read in an adjectival manner

('divine'), there are texts in which Christ and the Spirit are not merely presented as divine

but even clearly identified substantivally with *theos* as a definite noun.

In Titus 2:13 we read of 'the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great

God (*tou megalou theou*) and Savior, Jesus Christ'. Quoting Psalm 45:6-7, the writer to

the Hebrews has the Father saying to the Son, 'Your throne, O God (*ho theos*) is unto

forever….You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; on account of this, God

(*ho theos*), your God (*ho theos sou*), has anointed you…' (Hebrews 1:8-9).[706]

Intriguingly, in a text in which the Father appears substantivally with *theos* as a definite

noun, and that with the help of the article, the Son likewise is identified substantivally

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[705] Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, p. 258.

[706] If the Hebrew *ĕlōhîm* in Psalm 45:6 is used with reference to a human king (see Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Leicester and Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973], p. 172; Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008], pp. 99-100), the quotation of the Psalm in the context of Hebrews 1 (esp. 1:10-12) with the use of *theos* clearly envisions Christ as *theos*, not just as one who is humanly exalted with respect to office, but as Yahweh himself.

and definitely as *theos* with the help of the article.[707] According to the mind of God in

Holy Scripture, then, one may (indeed, must) identify the Father as the one God and the

Son as the one God without identifying the Father as the Son or vice versa. Again, in 1

John 5:20, assuming that it is God the Son who is in view, the Son is called 'the true God'

(*ho alēthinos theos*).[708] In Acts 5:3-4, the apostle Peter charges Ananias and Sapphira

with lying to the Holy Spirit and then equates this with lying to God. In this *locus*

classicus for the deity of the Holy Spirit, he too is identified as God with the article (*tō*

theō). Therefore, contra Moreland and Craig, the statement of the Athanasian Creed – *Ita*

deus Pater: deus Filius; deus [*et*] *Spiritus Sanctus* – should be upheld because of its

scriptural foundation. Only by neglecting the explanatory fruitfulness of the modal

distinction in the doctrine of the Trinity (and perhaps also by confusing the *distinctio*

modalis with modal*ism*) can one affirm the creedal statement only to find oneself bound

to identify the each of the persons with each of the others. With the *distinctio modalis* in

hand, one can identify each of the persons as the one God and then, given that each

person is not identical with God absolutely or exhaustively but just as a certain *modus*

subsistendi and is thus distinct from God taken absolutely as *modus rei a re*, one can

affirm that each of the persons is *realiter relative* distinct from the other persons as *modi*

subsistendi. In this way, it also becomes clear that the identity of each of the persons

with the one God does not entail that 'each person of the Trinity is identical to the whole

Trinity.' For the modal distinction and real identity of a given person and the essence in

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[707] The presence of the article in biblical Greek is not always a signal for the definiteness
of the noun to which it is attached, but it appears to include this function in this text.
[708] Various commentators take this to be an identification of Christ as God. See, e.g.,
Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary*, trans.
Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 263; Brown, *The Epistles of*
John, pp. 625-6.

God allows that other persons who are distinct *modi subsistendi* also should be really identical with God considered essentially.[709]

In this connection, the Reformed scholastics address a *syllogismus expositorius* advanced by heretical teachers (viz. *Essentia Divina est Pater, Essentia Divina est Filius; Ergo Filius est Pater*) and point out that the *terminus medius* (the divine essence) is wrongly assumed in the syllogism to be not only singular but also incommunicable, which would of course lead to the conclusion that the Father must be Son. However, the essence is singular and communicable, entailing that, while each person partakes of, or, more precisely, is really identical with, *tota divinitas*, each does not do so *totaliter* as the other two also are really identical with *tota divinitas*.[710] Having contended that the personhood and interaction of the persons, rightly framed, align with the doctrine of divine simplicity and having polemicized against the notion that there are three divine subjectivities, it remains to be argued that the trinitarian distinctions that still must be made in a doctrine of God inclusive of divine simplicity do in fact comport with this attribute.

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[709] Compare Owen, *Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 2:409.
[710] See Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 25, 23-24, pp. 298-9; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 24, 19, p. 242. It is worth observing that, in urging that the essence is shared by more than one, these authors do not compromise the singularity and particularity of the essence by speaking as if it were a universal akin to created essences.

### iv.	The Modal and Real Relative Distinctions

Contrary to the claim that divine simplicity is inimical to all species of distinction, proponents like Thomas, Zanchi, Turretin, Mastricht, and others carefully uphold that God's being is free from real and formal distinctions and yet, under the relative aspect, includes modal and even real relative distinctions. The aim of this section is to make the case that the modal and real relative distinctions in the doctrine of the Trinity are compatible with God's simplicity and that God's simplicity has a rightful place in the grammar – the set of theological concepts in their discursive interrelations – of trinitarian thought. In order to accomplish this, the section proceeds through an (at some points, recapitulatory) ordering of the concepts of essence, person, mode, relation, and personal properties in the trinitarian thought broadly exemplified by Thomas and various Reformed orthodox writers and reiterated in the present work in conjunction with the doctrine of God's simplicity.

The divine essence is what God is as God. In the case of human creatures we can speak of *humanitas* and also (at least roughly) demarcate its content (traditionally, *animal rationalis*). However, with *deitas*, while it is a biblically-sanctioned concept (see Rom. 1:20; Gal. 4:8; Col. 2:9; 2 Pet 1:4) that must be invoked in theology in order to underscore that God is God and that he is God with or without the world, its content remains incomprehensible and ineffable, admitting of only an inadequate knowledge by apprehension of various divine attributes on the part of human persons. While in creatures essence and suppositum are objectively distinct as *principium rei* and *res*, in

God it is not so. In God, *deitas* is not *essentia essentians* or *forma informans* and, correspondingly, *Deus* is not *essentia essentiata* or *forma informata*.[711] Instead, God is *ipsa deitas subsistens*.[712] The name *deitas* signals *in abstracto* that God is not God *per participationem* but *a se* and absolutely, with no underlying *principium* constituting or determining his being. The name *Deus* reminds us *in concreto* that God is not a detached idea but is rather subsisting, living, and active.[713]

Each person of the Trinity is a *subsistentia* or *modus subsistendi* of the divine essence or of the one God. On the one hand, *hypostasis* or *subsistentia* is an appropriate term because each of the three subsists *per se* (rather than being a mere inhering feature *in alio*) and is incommunicable.[714] This claim has encountered the objection that a singular *essentia* precludes three *subsistentiae* or *supposita*, which has then met with the response that this is the case only on the creaturely, finite plane of existence. The singular divine

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[711] On these metaphysical distinctions, see Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3, pp. 43-4; cap. 27, p. 220. As noted earlier, this identity of essence and suppositum in God accentuates the significance of God's simplicity and the Creator-creature distinction even within a generally Aristotelian perspective on the matter of universals and natures in creation. For, while there are not separate universals existing outside of created supposita themselves, they nevertheless are objectively distinct from such supposita as *principia rei* to *res* and so govern the being of the supposita. In God there is neither a separate universal of deity nor even an instrinic principle other than God himself determining what he is.

[712] As to why this is the case, see the sections above on God's singularity and aseity in particular.

[713] On this estimation of the abstract and concrete names, see Thomas, *ST*, Ia, qu. 3, art 3. ad 1, p. 40; Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 10; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 2, cap. 8, p. 141.

[714] Cf., e.g., Jerome Zanchi, *De Tribus Elohim, Aeterno Patre, Filio, et Spiritu Sancto, Uno Eodemque Jehova, Libri XIII, Pars Prior* (Neustadii Palatinorum,1597), lib. 2, cap. 7, pp. 528-9. One might say that the *per se* here respects each of the persons as God (as God they subsist and do not inhere *in alio*) and also, in a certain sense, as persons (as Father, Son, and Spirit, they are not mere qualities of one another).

essence in its infinity is communicable to three incommunicable *subsistentiae*.[715] As the

Father, Son, and Spirit are *supposita* who understand, will, and act, they are fittingly

called *personae*,[716] even if they are so *secundum essentiam* and not *secundum idiomata*.[717]

On the other hand, the persons cannot be called *subsistentiae* without qualification. For

in his singularity and actuality God as one subsists *per se*.[718] In other words, while the

persons are incommunicable, they are not *primae substantiae* or *individua* of a species of

deitas.[719] Indeed, each of the persons is identical with the one God in Holy Scripture.

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[715] Owen, *Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 388;
Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 1, pp. 179, 181-3; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae
Elencticae*, III, qu. 25, 16, pp. 297-8; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2,
cap. 24, 17, p. 240.

[716] Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 16, p. 207; Mastricht, *Theoretico-
Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 24, 6, p. 237.

[717] When some (e.g., Moreland and Craig above) observe that older theologians speak of
the Father, Son, and Spirit as having markers of personhood, particularly intellect and
will, and then suggest that 'modern' notions of personhood are after all not so discordant
with the traditional understanding of the personhood of the persons, this is to miss the
real issue. For at stake is not whether the persons have the *notae personalitatis* but rather
whether they have them according to the common essence and thus singularly or
according to their peculiar, distinguishing characteristics and thus multiply, which, as
argued above, would run contrary to some pertinent threads of biblical teaching and
would be regarded by patristic authors such as Gregory of Nyssa as tritheistic.

[718] So Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 1, pp. 179, 181-3. See also Richard A.
Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed
Orthodoxy ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Four: The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids:
Baker, 2003), pp. 179-80. God may be said to 'subsist', not as one who underlies
accidents, but as one who exists *per se* and not *in alio* (Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae
Elencticae*, III, qu. 23, 4-5, pp. 280-1).

[719] Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 84; Turretin, *Institutio
Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 25, 1, p. 292. Really identical to each of the persons as a
distinct *modus subsistendi personalis*, the essence is not a specific universal
communicated to or participated by multiple beings. See Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae
Elencticae*, III, qu. 25, 16, pp. 297-8. Maccovius ascertains, then, that the multiplicity of
persons in God does not introduce quantity: *In Deo summa est unitas, at ut illa in Deo est
in eo nihil numeratur; non enim numerus proprie tres unitates, sed tres personas, sive
personales relationes hic notat, quae sunt una simplicissima unitas, una nempe essentia
& in nullo modo pluralitas quaedam essentialis* (*Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 2, p. 214). Cf.

This then underwrites the more precise descriptor of *tropoi hyparxeōs* or *modi subsistendi*, which conduces to the real (though not modally exhaustive) identity of each person with the one God and yet also to the objective distinctions among the persons that must be honored.[720] Since each person as a *modus subsistendi* is really identical with the one God and with the divine essence, the modal distinction according to which each of the persons is distinct from God only as *modus a re* coheres with the doctrine of divine simplicity and the repudiation of real (as in *res* to *res*) distinctions in God: *Distinctio…non est compositio*.[721] Thus, 'Trinity is when the same Essence hath divers wayes of subsisting; and Triplicity is when one thing is compounded of three parts.'[722]

All of this bears on the character of the distinction between person and person. That which concerns God as God and without reference to anything else is absolute, and, because God as God or in his essence is singular, that which is absolute is singular and

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Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 91. Yet in the case of the divine persons, *numerus* should still be taken as *respectivus* (Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 10, p. 112).

[720] Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 4, pp. 85, 93. As Muller points out (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics,* 4:193-4), description of the persons as 'modes' does not yield Sabellianism. For the orthodox use of *tropoi hyparxeōs* or *modi subsistendi* and the attendant modal distinction pertain to the persons *ad intra*, eternally and objectively, not to mere outward manifestation. As Barth puts it, in orthodoxy there are three τρόποι ὑπάρξεως while in Sabellianism there are three τρόποι ἀποκαλύψεως (*CD*, I/1, p. 353). In metaphysical works modes are characterized sometimes as *affectiones entis* ('dispositions of being') (e.g. Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 11). However, the modes of subsisting in God in contrast to creatures are said by the Reformed orthodox to transcend the element of affectability and imperfection. So Ames, *Medulla Theologica*, lib. 1, cap. 5, 8, p. 16; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 27, 3, p. 306. Dolezal comments, 'This is clearly an *analogical* understanding of mode. What is retained in our God-talk is the conception of mode as an essence's "manner" of subsistence. What is removed from our ordinary conception of mode when we speak of God is its function as a quality *modifying* or conveying some additional [actuality] to a thing in which it inheres' ('Trinity, Simplicity, and the Status of God's Personal Relations', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 [2014], p. 96).

[721] Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 2, pp. 87-8.

[722] Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 16, p. 205.

indivisible. Since the persons as *modi subsistendi* are really identical with the one God

and objectively distinct from one another, it follows that they are not really or essentially

but modally and relatively distinct from one another.[723] The modal distinction wards off

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[723] So Leigh, *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 16, p. 206. An absolute aspect
and a relative aspect of God's being may be discerned in the doctrine of God, and this
absolute-relative distinction possesses an organizational utility in theology proper (as
adumbrated in Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 40, art. 2, ad 2, p. 414; Turretin,
Institutio Theologiae Elencticae, III, 23, 1, p. 280). That which is absolute concerns God
as God and without reference to anything else. In view of the singularity of God as God
and of the divine essence, whatever is located under the absolute aspect is always
singular and indivisible. Because the persons are each really identical with the one God
himself in Holy Scripture and are distinguished in relation to one another, a relative
aspect also must be registered in theology proper. That which is relative concerns the
persons in relation to one another and hence according to their own peculiar,
distinguishing characteristics and their consequents as displayed, for example, in the
appropriation of certain *opera ad extra* to the Father, Son, or Spirit in keeping with their
idiomatic *taxis*. The absolute and relative aspects are inseparable. Indeed, each of the
persons identified under the relative aspect is, *in concreto*, really identical with the one
God as a mode, even if the incommunicable mode of subsisting considered as such and in
the abstract is not convertible with the communicable essence considered as such and in
the abstract (Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 3, cap. 2, p. 200; Ames,
Medulla Theologica, lib. 1, cap. 5, 3-4, p. 16; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*,
III, qu. 23, 8, p. 282; qu. 25, 24, p. 299; qu. 27, 1, 5, 8, pp. 306-7; Mastricht, *Theoretico-
Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 24, 8, p. 238). Yet, whenever one considers one of the
persons not as God but as Father, Son, or Spirit, one is pondering the relative aspect of
God's being. Each person may be called God *absolutely* in the sense that *quoad se* he is
God and is really identical with God, though not in the sense that he and he alone is
exhaustively God to the exclusion of the other two. In this sense, Leigh (*Systeme or Body
of Divinity*, book 2, chap. 2, pp. 132-3) comments that each person may be called God
'singularly' and 'by synecdoche' (by an implicit reference to one particular person as
God in a given context). Each person may be called God *modally* in the sense that he is a
mode of subsisting of God or God's essence. Each person may be God called *relatively*
in the sense that he is a distinct *modus subsistendi Dei* just *ad alterum* in the Godhead.
All of this requires the use of reduplicative reasoning in theology: God must be
considered as *Deus unus* and yet also as *Deus trinus* or *trinitas*. If the absolute and
relative aspects are subjected to admixture, each undergoes a certain distortion. For
example, if the patristic theologoumenon of the Father begetting the essence is not taken
to mean that the Father begets one (the Son) who shares the selfsame essence but rather
that the Father is in fact prior in origin to the essence, then the essence is received by the
Son in a diminutive iteration, which implies an inequality of Father and Son (so
Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 4, pp. 86-7. Hence it is critical to
clarify that the Father does not beget the essence *per se* but rather *secundum modum*

the problematic construal of the persons as instances of a universal or individuals of a species and yet also preserves the objectivity of the distinctions among the persons. In this discussion, a mode is neither *substantia* nor *accidens* but is a transcendental deportment, determination, or ordering of that of which it is a mode (i.e., God or the divine essence).[724] Importantly, as Alsted remarks, 'Modes of being are not figments.'[725] On the one hand, they are not *entia* ('for, if whatever is in things or beings were also a being, a procession would be put into infinity') and yet they are still *extra mentem*. Person from essence in God is distinct neither *in ratione sola* (by a purely rational distinction), nor *ut ens ab ente* (by a real distinction, in which two *res* are separable), nor *ut essentia ab essentia* (by a formal distinction), but *ut ordo essentiae ab essentia* (by a modal distinction and, indeed, a real distinction taken 'loosely…for the opposite of a distinction in reason by bare cogitation of mind').[726] Accordingly, it is apropos to draw a *distinctio realis modalis* between person and essence and then also between person and person in theology proper.[727] Under the counterbalancing concerns of alleviating the

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(Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 8, p. 55; cf. Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 27, 16, p. 309). Otherwise, as Mastricht suggests, a denial of the Son as *autotheos* (though not a denial of the Son as *autoprosōpon*) then pushes the Trinity into the territory of Arianism (*Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 26, 19, p. 259). Note also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:322-3.
[724] Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 85; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, pp. 58-60; appendix, p. 279.
[725] Alsted, *Metaphysica*, appendix, p. 281.
[726] Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 4, cap. 4, pp. 85-6.
[727] So Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 29, p. 240. Cf. Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 27, 11, pp. 307-8; Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, lib. 2, cap. 24, 9, p. 238. The *distinctio realis* between one divine *hypostasis* and another is not *secundum rem absolutam* but only *secundum rem relativam* (*ST*, Ia, qu. 28, art. 3, p. 324). Turretin seeks to fuse the *distinctio realis relativa* and *distinctio modalis* (*Institutio Elencticae Theologiae*, III, qu. 27, 11, pp. 307-8).

notion of three divine individuals within a species of *deitas* and upholding the objectivity

of the distinctions among the three, this *distinctio modalis* emerges, and it is one that

comports with the absence of composition in God: 'In which are many real beings, in this

is composition; but not where there are merely many modes, because modes merely

modify and characterize the essence, they do not compound.'[728]

With the *distinctio realis modalis* in hand, affirmation of the doctrine of divine simplicity
does not resort to 'bare assertion' and 'neo-Sabellianism' in explicating its relation to the
Trinity (*pace* Smith, *Oneness and Simplicity of God*, p. 55.

[728] Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 9, p. 211. Of course, in the sketch
of divine simplicity offered in the preceding section, it is not only *entia realia* that can
produce composition. In fact, if *entia* or *res* are, properly, only substances and accidents,
then proper entitative composition is actually in the minority in the types of composition
denied of God. Thus, lack of two or more *res* does not automatically alleviate untoward
composition. Other kinds of *partes* (*propriae* or *impropriae*) are, for various reasons,
denied of God. Indeed, *actus* and *potentia* are called *modi entis* in the metaphysical
works that inform this defense of divine simplicity and yet are said to yield a composition
which should be denied of God. Thus, modal distinction does not automatically alleviate
composition. However, when Turretin and others insist here that *entia realia* are the true
culprits of composition, and that modes do not compose things but only modify and
characterize them, these are simply general statements. Turretin himself (*Institutio
Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 7, 5, pp. 210-11) also denies of God types of composition
that, he explicitly recognizes, are not as to *res* and *res*. Moreover, while *modi disjuncti*
(which divide *ens*) such as *actus* and *potentia passiva* entail a certain composition to be
denied of God (Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, p. 117), modes certainly are not
entitative parts producing entitative composition. As Keckermann relates, modes are
neither substances nor accidents but constitute a third metaphysical category (*Systema
Logica*, 1, cap. 5, p. 678; cf. Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, p. 58). In addition, they
generally do not entail composition at all (Keckermann, *Systema S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1,
cap. 4, p. 85; cf. Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 10, p. 85). A mode of being as
such is just its being in that mode (Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, p. 58). For
example, the transcendental *unitas* is *ens* as *indivisum* and *divisum a quolibet alio*
(Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, p. 63). Thus, it is legitimate to reason that the Father,
Son, and Spirit as *modi subsistendi* do not introduce composition in God. *Actus* and
potentia passiva are disjunctive modes of being that are opposed to one another *privative*
and thus can modify one and the same being only by pertaining to different parts of that
being and hence presuppose composition. But the divine persons are opposed to one
another *relative* and thus do not require different parts in God in order to modify just one
ens (Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 13, pp. 122, 131-2). In sum, the Father, Son, and
Spirit are not different *entia realia* or *res* (a necessary condition for alleviating

The persons as *modi subsistendi* are relatively distinct from one another. The

relation between person and person is what constitutes and distinguishes each person in

his own mode of subsisting and incommunicability. The modal distinction between

person and person characterizes the terms of the distinction (what is distinct from what),

but the relative distinction characterizes the nature of the distinction or alterity itself.

Whatever respects God as such is absolute and singular and, given that each of the

persons is the one God, such cannot distinguish and multiply the persons, which implies

that the persons are distinct only in relation to one another. In view of the biblical

portrayal of the hypostatic *taxis* in the economy, along with the eternity of the distinct

persons (Jn. 1:1; 5:26, 30; 8:58; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13-14, 17:5; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 9:14;

1 Pet 1:20), the relations among the persons in the immanent Trinity may be called

relations of origin. The Father is the Father by a *paternitas ad Filium* as he eternally

begets the Son; the Son is the Son by a *filiatio ad Patrem* as he is eternally begotten of

the Father; the Spirit is the Spirit by a *spiratio passiva ad Patrem et Filium* as he is

eternally spirated by the Father and Son.[729] These relations are not predicamental but

transcendental. That is, they are not founded upon (mutually ordered) accidents inhering

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composition) and they are *modi subsistendi* opposed only *relative* (a sufficient condition
for alleviating composition).
[729] As Thomas makes clear (*ST*, Ia, qu. 40, art. 2, corp., p. 413; art. 4, p. 418), one ought
not to conceive of the processions as prior to the relations, lest one envisage the persons
'extra-relationally' and thereby dissolve or absolutize the persons (Emery, *Trinitarian
Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 122-7). We might say, then, that in the Trinity there
is an eternal simulateneity of relation and procession. This line of thinking stands in
contrast to that of Moltmann (*Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 189), for example, who wishes
to extend the distinctions of the persons beyond their relations to 'their character as
persons'.

in the persons.[730] Indeed, these relations are not other than the personal modes of

subsisting themselves; they are just the respective modes of subsisting *ad invicem*.[731]

Likewise, the personal *proprietates* of the three (*paternitas*, *filatio*, and *spiratio*) are not

additional *entia* inhering in the persons. Rather, they are simply the respective persons

considered in the abstract.[732] Once more, then, the trinitarian distinctions in traditional

theology proper do not come into conflict with the doctrine of divine simplicity, for the

propria of the persons introduce no complexity in God even as they secure the real modal

and relative diversity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

In sum, each divine person is a mode of subsisting of the divine essence in

constitutive relative connection to another divine person (or, in the case of the Spirit, two

other persons, insofar as he is spirated by both the Father and the Son). Each person is

constituted essentially by (and identified really with) the divine essence which he

modifies or inflects and is constituted idiomatically and hypostatically by reference *ad*

alterum. The modal distinction circumvents the problem of a mere generic or specific

divine unity and secures the singularity of the God of Holy Scripture; the relative

distinction circumvents the problem of carving up the essential attributes of God and

partially allocating them to the three and retains the truth of the whole essence in the

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[730] On relations as strictly *non entia* and the application of this to trinitarianism, see
Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 2, pp. 88-9; Keckermann, *Scientiae Metaphysicae
Brevissima Synopsis et Compendium*, pars prior, cap. 14, p. 2033; Keckermann, *Systema
S.S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 4, p. 91; Alsted, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 10, p. 112; lib. 2,
cap. 5, p. 260; Maccovius, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 6, pp. 251-3, 256-64; Turretin,
Institutio Theologiae Elencticae, III, qu. 27, 18, p. 309.
[731] Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 40, art. 1, p. 411; Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae
Christianae*, lib. 3, cap. 2, p. 199; Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 23,
14, p. 284.
[732] So Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 40, art. 1, ad 1, p. 411; Emery, *Trinitarian
Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 121.

three who are co-equal. Both distinctions affirm the objective alterity of the persons and yet pose no threat at all to God's simplicity. Further, it should be noted that such an account does not reduce the persons to relations or give weight to the objection that a person cannot be a relation but must first be a person and then sustain a relation.[733] For each person is not merely a relation toward another but is God and is the divine essence subsisting in relation, which accounts for the ontological (or, more precisely, theological) reality or density of each person who is in relation and, as to his distinctness and incommunicability, in fact just is a relation.[734] Explaining the way in which person as relation in Thomas' trinitarianism 'integrates' personal distinction and essence, Emery writes, '[T]his is not a matter of relation considered simply according to its *ratio* (the pure connection) to the exclusion of its being....[T]he divine person *is* the relation in so far as it is a *subsisting* relation; it is the relation of origin in God, enjoying the prerogatives of the absolute in the mode of hypostatic incommunicability.'[735] In addition,

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[733] See Moltmann, *Trinity and Kingdom*, pp. 172-3. Here Moltmann warns against construing the persons as relations alone but also proscribes any attempt to remove the persons from their mutual relations. For Moltmann, person and relation are distinct even if they are still inseparable. Wesley Hill ('Divine Persons and Their Reduction to Relations: A Plea for Conceptual Clarity', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14 [2012], pp. 148-60) follows mutual accusations of reduction of the persons to relations on the part of both 'classical' and 'revisionist' trinitarians in contemporary debate. In the account taken up here, person and relation differ only as to the *modus significandi*. 'Person' is the essence subsisting with reference *ad alterum*, while 'relation' is semantically more restrictive, pointing up only the idiomatically constitutive reference *ad alterum*. So, e.g., Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 23, 14, p. 284.
[734] On the divine essence as the common *fundamentum* of the *relationes*, see Zanchi, *De Natura Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 2, pp. 88-9; Keckermann, *Systema S. Theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 3, p. 72 (incorrect pagination in original). For a slightly different description, see Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, III, qu. 27, 18, p. 309.
[735] Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 117-18, 121. Compare Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 3, cap. 2, p. 199; Rudi A. te Velde, 'The Divine Person(s): Trinity, Person, and Analogous Naming', in Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

to claim that something must be before it can be in relation is to remain entrenched in the causal and sequential dynamics of created being. However, in the *nunc stans* of God's immanent life there is no seriality between essence and person, one and three;[736] each divine person is at once the one God and also subsisting in and as a relation toward another, having no need to subsist first before assuming such a reference.[737] It has been objected also that 'it can safely be said that on no reasonable understanding of *person* can a person be equated with a relation' because relations are impersonal.[738] Yet, as with the objection that person must preexist relation, so here the real identity of each of the persons with the personal divine essence is again overlooked, and, in view of the exegetical and theological reasons delineated above, it may be restated that the Father, Son, and Spirit, while indelibly personal (understanding, willing, acting), are such *ousiōdōs*, not *hypostatikōs*.

Previous sections in this chapter have contended on exegetical grounds that a classical view of the Trinity in which the persons are *tropoi hyparxeōs* and only relatively distinct from one another need not be discarded in favor of a facultative tripling of the

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2011), pp. 366-8. A similar approach is sought in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 144. In this connection, just as God must be considered reduplicatively in Christian theology, so too the persons: each must be considered *qua Deus* or *qua essentia* and yet also *qua ad alterum*.

[736] [*E*]*ssentia non anterior tribus personis aut exterior sed eadem & individua & tota in singulis personis est, non extra illas* (Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, lib. 3, cap. 2, p. 199). On the negation of a serial relation between unity and Trinity in God, compare John Webster, 'Trinity and Creation', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010), p. 8.

[737] Compare Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 40, art. 2, ad 4, p. 414.

[738] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, p. 586. See also the concerns voiced in Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation, with Special Reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's* Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 115-16, 251-62.

divine personality. However, critics of divine simplicity have asserted that even a traditional rendering of the Trinity is inconsistent with this attribute. Against this assertion, the present analysis of the triune distinctions, in which the persons are really modally and relatively distinct from one another by transcendental relations recognized in personal properties that are the modes themselves taken *in abstracto*, indicates the consonance of the doctrines of the Trinity and divine simplicity in theology proper. For the persons do not compose God but are the one God subsisting in their peculiar relative modes, and the persons are not composed by essence and relation or *idiomata* but rather are the essence diversely modified and characterized in transcendental relation *ad alterum*.

D.   Conclusion

With the positive momentum of the dogmatic case for divine simplicity filled out in the previous chapters, this chapter has sought to meet the (arguably) most poignant objections to the doctrine. It has been said by recent theologians such as Barth and by analytic philosophers such as Plantinga that older iterations of divine simplicity vis-à-vis the divine attributes are theologically and logically deficient. Yet it has been argued here that an account of simplicity in the vein of Thomas and Reformed orthodox authors, on the one hand, affirms the multi-faceted richness of God in his manifold attributes and, on the other hand, contains no logical inadequacies as the presumption of univocity in theological description is punctured by the biblical portrayal of God. From here, against the claim that divine simplicity undermines God's freedom in the act of creation, this

chapter has argued that the anatomy of the divine decree is such that, while the *actus intelligendi* and *volendi* in God is necessary, the tendency and specification of the decree remain entirely free. Finally, against the assertion that, even granting an older account of the Trinity, the distinctions among the divine persons conflict with divine simplicity, this chapter has outlined how the real modal and real relative distinctions in the Trinity both properly delimit and uphold the immanent and objective triune distinctions while standing in coherence with God's simplicity. With this, the dogmatic articulation of divine simplicity sketched in the present undertaking is complete.

Conclusion

This formulation of divine simplicity has proceeded on the conviction that this attribute is an implicate of God's singularity, aseity, immutability, infinity, and act of *creatio ex nihilo*. It has been maintained throughout that a dogmatic approach to the doctrine is in order, and this has involved attending to the biblical teaching on the various attributes that imply God's simplicity and supplying elaborative clarification and examining the ways in which each of these divine perfections conduct the theologian to a recognition of simplicity. After delineating the central claims of the doctrine of divine simplicity, the proposed exegetico-dogmatic approach was carried out, following the manner in which each of the attributes distinctly considered addresses and vouchsafes certain of the constituent claims of the teaching of God's simplicity.

God's singularity implies that he is himself the fullness of his deity subsisting, that he transcends the categories of genus and species, that he is really identical with each of his perfections and is therefore not composed of substance and accidents, and that he is without composition altogether in the uniqueness with which he is God. God's aseity implies that he is *actus purus*, *ipsa deitas subsistens*, *ipsum esse subsistens*, really identical with each of his own perfections, and free from all composition with nothing back of him governing or actualizing his being. Likewise, God's immutability implies again that he is wholly in act, without *potentia passiva* whereby he might be altered or enhanced. In his selfsameness and indivisibility, he is each of his perfections subsisting, without accidents and without any composition whatsoever. God's infinity too implies that he is *actus purus*. In his boundless perfection, each of God's attributes is really

identical with his essence, and each of the divine persons is really identical with his essence subsisting in a certain manner. Finally, the act of *creatio ex nihilo* implies that God is *actus purus* and *ipsum esse subsistens* without any eternal co-existents. Just so, the simple triune Creator is the self-efficacious and ultimate origin of all that exists.

Several concerns about divine simplicity raised by modern systematic theologians have been addressed at different points. Properly articulated, the doctrine of divine simplicity emerges from the theological teaching of Scripture, not from uncritical absorption of Greek philosophy. The doctrine emphasizes that God really is the perfection of each of his attributes revealed in history, instead of emptying the divine essence of its immanent richness or distancing it from the liveliness of the economy. Rightly grasped, the conception of God as *actus purus* dismantles notions of an inert God and underscores that he is immediately the subject of his own action and ever moving in the life of his creatures. Finally, divine simplicity conduces to the personal distinctiveness and interactivity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, casting these in keeping with God's singularity and yet also, in the dialogical relationship between *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*, acclimatizing to the biblical portrayal of the Holy Trinity so that it (simplicity) embraces real relative distinctions among the divine persons.

A number of philosophers' concerns too are addressed throughout this study. God's identity with his attributes and with his own existence necessitates a reframing of wisdom, love, *esse*, and so forth, so that these are shorn of any *prima facie* ultimacy, relativized by God and particularized as God, whose self-revelation then discloses the true character of these, instead of these effecting a depersonalization of God. In addition, divine simplicity not only asserts the identity of the perfection of the various divine

attributes in God's *essentia eminens* but also admits a *distinctio virtualis* and even a consequent *distinctio formalis ad nos* of the attributes, upending the purported impossibility of the identity of such manifestly distinct predicates. Further, God's simplicity resonates with his freedom with respect to creation because, as *actus purus*, he acts hyperphysically by his own essence and in just this way freely refers the divine decree to its creaturely objects, instead of needing a novel movement *ad creaturas* to settle his actuality. Finally, because it wields the *distinctio modalis realis* in trinitarian theologizing, this account of simplicity coheres with the doctrine of the Trinity and, indeed, circumvents a perceived need for potentially exegetically untethered and creedally tenuous moves in trinitarian thinking.

Having offered an account of divine simplicity, the present work, in light of this material task, concludes with two brief formal considerations with regard to future work to be done with divine attributes such as simplicity in current theology. First, the exegetical impulse in dogmatic conceptualization in theology proper is vital. Against the collusive temptations to believe that the Bible has little to say about putatively 'philosophical' attributes such as simplicity and to believe that one is free to discuss these without recourse to the material content of the Bible, taking up scriptural teaching in discursive reflection both dispels reticence to speak theologically about God and curbs speculation about God.

Second, as much as the principial role of Holy Scripture in Christian theology is qualitatively different from the role of authors such as Thomas, Polanus, Mastricht, and others, they too ought to be read more attentively in ongoing study of the doctrines of the divine attributes and the Trinity. Theologians such as Barth and Moltmann – the latter is

more egregious here – have too hastily drawn conclusions about older accounts of simplicity, immutability, and other elements of theology proper, and have popularized mistaken views of the history of theology to the neglect of helpful voices in the Christian doctrine of God. Likewise, a number of analytic philosophers, though prepared to engage the work of Thomas, for example, have not always read him carefully and have thereby alleged that his understanding of divine simplicity is logically indefensible or even unintelligible. Though not a call to halt the analytic participation in theological discussion, such an observation is meant to encourage further diligence in engaging with the great figures of the theological tradition. To the extent that persistence in theological interpretation of the Bible and patient retrieval of past insights are pursued in contemporary theology proper, Christian discourse about God will be enriched and strengthened.

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