Divine Simplicity, Aseity, and Sovereignty

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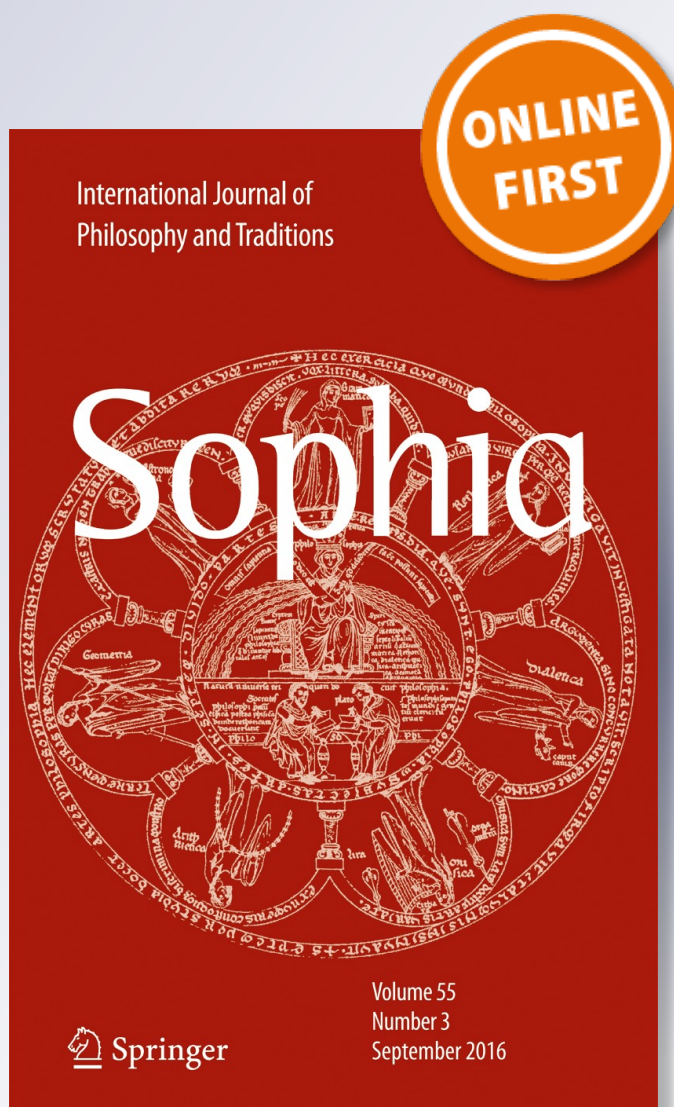# Divine Simplicity, Aseity, and Sovereignty

Matthew Baddorf[1]

Abstract The doctrine of divine simplicity has recently been ably defended, but very little work has been done considering reasons to believe God is simple. This paper begins to address this lack. I consider whether divine aseity (the traditionally prominent motivation) or the related notion of divine sovereignty provide us with good reason to affirm divine simplicity. Divine complexity has sometimes been thought to imply that God would possess an efficient cause; or, alternatively, that God would be grounded by God's constituents. I argue that divine complexity implies neither of these, and so that a complex God could also exist *a se*. Similarly, a complex God might be thought less sovereign than a simple God, due to lacking control over the divine constituents. I argue in reply that a complex God either has just as much control as a simple God, or that a complex God's relative lack of control should cause no theological problems. The upshot is that neither the doctrines of divine aseity or of divine sovereignty give theists good reason to endorse divine simplicity.

Introduction

> All philosophers concede the simplicity of the First Cause …
>
> —Thomas Aquinas[1]

The doctrine of divine simplicity is not as popular now as Aquinas claimed it was in his own day, but it has received notable defenses (e.g., Brower 2009, Pruss 2008). In

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[1]See Aquinas (2010, p. 513)

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fact, it seems to have undergone a revival. Unfortunately, this revival has neglected evangelism: few recent philosophers have published detailed considerations of arguments for divine simplicity.[2] Instead of offering reasons to skeptics, divine simplicity's defenders have bolstered the faithful, arguing that the view lacks implausible or impious consequences. Such work is important. But even if we grant that divine simplicity is a viable option, what reason do we have to embrace it? Or, to quote Paul Vincent Spade, 'why should it be *important* that God … is metaphysically simple?' (Spade 2008, section 1.1.) This paper explores these relatively neglected questions.

Despite the lack of attention to reasons for divine simplicity, there is something of a consensus as to the primary motivation of its medieval defenders. The medievals maintained that God was not complex because divine simplicity was thought to be necessary for the doctrine of divine aseity (see, e.g., Wolterstorff 1991 p. 549). Given the relative lack of attention to arguments for divine simplicity in contemporary literature, it is hard to say whether this is still the leading motivation of theists who are drawn to endorse it. Yet, it is as good a place as any to begin.

In this essay, I examine whether divine aseity or the (historically) closely related notion of divine sovereignty provide compelling reasons to accept divine simplicity.[3] In the next section, I explain what I mean by divine simplicity and aseity. Roughly put, simplicity requires that God lack any sort of parts, and aseity requires that God (and only God) exist without being at all dependent upon anything. I also briefly sketch why one might want an alternative to divine simplicity. In the section 'Simplicity and aseity,' I consider whether divine complexity would contradict the doctrine of divine aseity, either by implying that God must be (causally or otherwise) dependent, or by implying that God's constituents are just as fundamental as God.[4] I claim that a belief in the divine aseity doctrine does not give theists good reason to rule out divine complexity and give a new argument that God's constituents cannot be as fundamental as God. In the section 'Simplicity and Sovereignty,' I consider whether theists serious about divine sovereignty ought to accept divine simplicity. I conclude that belief in a strong form of divine sovereignty also does not provide sufficient reason for ruling out divine complexity. The upshot is that divine simplicity is not a necessary condition for robust forms of divine aseity or sovereignty. I close by briefly mentioning some questions in theistic metaphysics that deserve study if I am correct.

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[2] Few, but not none; see, e.g., Plantinga (1980), Leftow (1990), Hughes (1989), and Fowler (2015). Of these authors, only Leftow endorses an argument for divine simplicity from something like the doctrine of divine aseity as I present it. Fowler and I agree that divine aseity does not require simplicity, but only that God be prior to God's parts, and we further agree that it is reasonable to think that the latter might be the case. He does not, however, consider the causal principle I discuss in the section 'Does DC imply God has a cause?', or whether divine sovereignty provides a reason for accepting divine simplicity.

[3] I say that divine sovereignty is historically a closely related notion because Plantinga considered the doctrines of divine aseity and divine sovereignty to be closely linked in his (1980). I suspect that the truth of the doctrine of divine aseity does not imply anything about divine sovereignty, but that those who care about one are likely to care about the other.

[4] I use the terms 'constituents' and 'parts' synonymously.

Divine Simplicity, Complexity, and Aseity

'Divine simplicity' can be understood in several ways; perhaps the only thing different views of divine simplicity share is that they all claim that God lacks some kind of complexity. Thomas Aquinas, for example, lists a number of different ways in which he claims God is simple (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.3.1-8). Some of these are relatively uncontroversial: e.g., that God lacks a body, and hence, physical parts. I will follow most contemporary writers in using the phrase 'divine simplicity' to refer to a more extreme kind of lack of complexity: in this sense, God has no parts at all, physical or metaphysical.[5] (As Wolterstorff notes, one could technically believe in divine simplicity while also believing that all creatures lack metaphysical parts as well (Wolterstorff 1991, p. 548). In this case, divine simplicity is a trivial doctrine. I will assume a constituent ontology—that is, an ontology on which some things at least possess metaphysical parts.[6])

Suppose divine simplicity is true, and that God is more or less as most theists suppose—supremely knowledgeable, loving, and powerful, for example. Then, although God is knowledgeable, loving, and powerful, God's love[7] is identical with God's knowledge, both of which are identical with God's power, all of which are identical with God.[8]

This is strange. Perhaps much of its oddity comes from the fact that, although humans are also (sometimes) knowledgeable and loving, we think that we are so by virtue of different properties (knowledge and love), and it is hard to see how such properties could really be identical. Divine simplicity advocates typically think these properties are not identical in the human case, which is perhaps the major reason why they tend to favor equivocal or analogical theories of predication.[9] I will not discuss the feasibility of such theories here. But even if an equivocal or analogical theory of predication is successful, there still seems to be something odd about the claim that every true intrinsic predication of God is made true by the same thing. For then, all of God's attributes—God's necessary omniscience, omnipotence, perfect goodness, and any others—would be identical, and each of them identical with God. Although defenders of divine simplicity claim this is not impossible, I know of no one who has claimed this is not odd. Even if recent defenses of the view show it to be possible, it is understandable to look for alternatives. And, of course, if divine simplicity commits

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[5] In this paper, the word 'parts' always refers to proper parts. By 'physical parts' I mean parts which are themselves bodies (or which would be if they were not attached to a whole). By 'metaphysical parts' I mean any parts which are not physical parts. Paradigmatic examples of the former include human legs and hearts; examples of the latter would include tropes, hacceities, and substrates. It is worth stressing that not all proponents of something they called 'divine simplicity' have held as strong of a view as the one I will discuss. For example, Duns Scotus uses his 'formal distinction' to allow for distinctions between God's attributes while endorsing a sort of divine simplicity; see Cross (1999, p. 42–45). Gregory of Nyssa provides another example (see Radde-Gallwitz 2009, p. 212). Their views seem to me to be inconsistent with the strong divine simplicity thesis discussed in this paper.

[6] See van Inwagen (2011) and Gould (2011, p. 131) for recent discussions of constituent vs relational ontologies.

[7] By which I mean God's lovingness or disposition to love, not any particular relation of love.

[8] This need not imply that God is a property, as Plantinga (1980) alleged. It could be that God is identical to God's goodness because God is the truthmaker for statements like 'God is good.' See Bergmann and Brower (2006) for a defense of this view.

[9] E.g., Hughes (1989) cites this as the deciding factor in Aquinas' rejection of univocal theories of predication (p. 58).

its proponents to controversial theses, such as analogical or equivocal theories of predication, then this gives us further reason to see whether theists must be committed to the view.

Any such alternative view that rejects the idea that God has physical parts is committed to the following:

Divine complexity (DC): God has metaphysical parts.

DC is compatible with some kinds of simplicity: perhaps God is identical to God's nature or essence, and is identical to God's existence, and lacks any complexity involving potentiality.[10] Nor does DC require that there be a 'real distinction' between God's parts. (For there to be a real distinction between two objects in the sense I am referring to here is for each object to be a substance, such that each could exist without the other.)

Just as DC is compatible with several interesting kinds of simplicity, so also there are many different theories about the nature and extent of divine complexity that are compatible with DC. Some of them have an easier time accommodating aseity/sovereignty concerns than others, and so, at times, I will defend a more specific claim:

Divine complexity-tropes (DC-T): God is composed (at least partly) of tropes.[11]

DC-T, of course, implies DC, so a successful defense of the former will also vindicate the latter.

DC-T allows us to avoid the odd claims mentioned earlier to which divine simplicity would commit us. If God's parts include tropes, it is plausible to think that God will posses at least some tropes with *de re* necessity. In that case, there is no reason we must claim that God's attributes are identical with each other (or with God); distinct attributes may be distinct tropes. DC-T need not commit us to the idea of a separate trope for each true predicate of God, of course; for example, God's knowledge that the earth goes around the sun might be made true by the same trope that makes it true that God knows that the moon goes around the earth (presumably, God's omniscience trope).

So we have reason to wonder whether DC and its more specific cousin, DC-T, can accommodate traditional motivations for divine simplicity. The two most prominent of

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[10] Whether it is possible for any complex thing to be simple in these ways is, of course, controversial. For example, on some metaphysical views any kind of complexity at all involves potentiality (e.g., Aquinas (1947), *ST* I.3.7 co.). Unfortunately, I cannot consider all the general metaphysical questions that impinge on these issues. Instead, I will just note that substantial argument is needed to show that DC implies any of the sorts of complexity listed in the text. And if we set such these issues aside, there is still an interesting question about whether DC is compatible with aseity or sovereignty. appropriate. Thanks to Caleb Cohoe for encouraging me to address this issue.

[11] By 'tropes' I mean particular instances of properties. Tropes are typically contrasted with universals; while a universal can be wholly present in multiple objects, tropes cannot. So, according to a trope theorist, two white sheets of paper each have their own whiteness trope. A Platonist universalist, on the other hand, would say each sheet is similarly related to the universal whiteness. The chief reason I am focusing on tropes is to avoid questions about God's relationship to universals. But it may be the case that almost everything I say in this paper about tropes would also apply to some constituent ontology that includes universals. (Relational ontologies, as I mentioned earlier, make God simple trivially.) Whether any such view is compatible with divine aseity and sovereignty is an interesting question that I will not pursue here.

I think that the traditional term 'mode' has often meant the same thing as what I refer to as tropes, but will use the contemporary terminology of tropes here. To avoid a potentially misleading connotation, though, it should be noted that I am not (like some contemporary advocates of tropes) committed to the view that substances are merely bundles of tropes. See Heil (2012) chapter 2 for discussion of tropes without bundle theory, and Maurin 2014 for a general introduction to contemporary trope theory.

such motivations, historically and in the contemporary literature, are divine aseity and divine sovereignty.

Aseity is just the property of existing *a se*, that is, not dependent upon anything else. Theists have typically held that God is the only being who has aseity, and that everything else depends on God. I will take this commitment on board; so by 'the doctrine of divine aseity' I mean the view that God, and only God, is completely independent, and that everything not identical to God depends upon God.[12] Furthermore, God is completely independent not only in bare existence, but also in character: God's possession of the divine attributes is not dependent upon anything (other than God) either. Some theists have suggested that divine aseity should be understood in a weaker sense, in which it is only things that are 'completely distinct' from God that must depend on God; if this is so, then divine parts, presumably not being completely distinct from God, might not have to depend on God.[13] But the stronger version just sketched is more likely to be acceptable to those attracted to the idea that aseity requires simplicity. Let us assume that the stronger version of the doctrine is true, and see whether this version requires the falsity of DC.

Simplicity and Aseity

There are two ways in which DC might conflict with the doctrine of divine aseity. One way in which something can depend on something else is by being caused by it. Accordingly, one might think that DC implies that God is caused. There are also non-causal relationships of dependency. One might think that DC implies that God metaphysically depends on something in some non-causal way. I will consider both worries.

Does DC Imply God Has a Cause?

Vincent Spade suggests that medieval philosophers rejected DC because they endorsed complexity implies causation (CIC): Any complex thing has an efficient cause.[14]

If DC and CIC are true, then God is complex, and hence requires an efficient cause, which is clearly incompatible with aseity. Why accept CIC? Unfortunately, Spade is unaware of any clear medieval argument for this view. Nor am I aware of any argument for this view by contemporary philosophers. One might argue by induction: if all complex creatures besides God have an efficient cause, then perhaps all complex things *simpliciter* have an efficient cause. But God is, on any reasonable view, quite different from creatures, so this kind of inference seems dubious. We cannot find relevant cases to compare God to, because there are no relevant cases. Consider: all beings with causal powers besides God have efficient causes. This is not a good reason to presume that all beings with causal powers have efficient causes, and thus that God either lacks causal powers or possess an efficient cause. (To be clear, I am not saying that we can never

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[12] By 'identical', I mean ordinary Liebnizian identity.

[13] Schmitt (2013, p. 125), as I read him, takes this approach. Another weaker sense that I will not address claims that only things that are capable of standing in dependence relations need be dependent on God; see Yandall (2015).

[14] Spade (2008, section 1.1). The precise formulation of CIC is my own. Robert Koons (2014, p. 263) seems to assume something like this in a cosmological argument from composite objects.

make any inferences about God from creatures; my argument requires no position on this. Nor am I saying that we cannot make comparisons between God and creatures. I am only saying that simple induction from cases of creatures yields very little evidence about God.[15])

Fortunately, we can do better than simple induction. Perhaps one might think we should accept CIC because it is intuitively plausible upon reflection on complexity. I think it does have some plausibility: if two things compose something together, it is natural to think that there must be some explanation for their compresence. And it is natural to think that this explanation for their compresence must take the form of some outside cause combining them.[16] Three considerations, however, suggest that we should not reject DC on the basis of the intuitive plausibility of CIC.

First, even if CIC seems plausible, it must be weighed against other plausible principles that are inconsistent with it. Consider the following:

Power-knowledge difference (PKD): For any being B with power and knowledge, the truths of the propositions 'B is powerful' and 'B is knowledgeable' are grounded in non-identical parts of B.

If PKD is true, and God is powerful and knowledgeable, then DC is true and CIC is false.[17] PKD seems plausible (to me, at least) upon reflection on the apparent differences between power and knowledge. (Knowledge could be classified as a power, of course; here I am referring to power in the everyday sense of being able to effect change.) Power and knowledge seem too different for something's power and knowledge to be identical. Furthermore, many similar principles involving other differences seem plausible as well (especially, perhaps, principles which assert that different parts of God must ground the truths of normative claims like 'God is good' and non-normative claims like 'God is omnipotent'). If we must weigh principles like PKD against CIC, it is not at all apparent that we must reject the former in favor of the latter.

Second, CIC seems most plausible for ordinary physical parts assembled together to form machines. It ought to seem less clearly correct when we consider metaphysical parts. DC-T requires merely the compresence of different tropes in God. It is not obvious that this particular kind of complexity is the sort of complexity which requires an explanation. Tropes seem to be dependent on their bearers in ways that make them inseparable from their bearers; given this intimacy, it is not clear that an explanation is required for the joint compresence of tropes.

Finally, supposing that some explanation is required for the compresence of God's constituents, it is far from obvious that the only kind of thing that could satisfactorily explain compresence is an outside sufficient cause. In the section 'Does DC imply God is non-causally dependent?' I will argue that God's tropes are dependent upon God. This suggests another explanation for their compresence: they are compresent because

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[15] Elsewhere, in Baddorf (2016) I defend an argument in which I consider cases of created beauty and eventually come to a conclusion about God. There, though, I am not doing simple induction, but trying to motivate a claim about the nature of beauty as such by considering what underlying features of beauty would best explain the cases I consider.

[16] By 'compresence,' here and elsewhere, I mean being jointly present in the same thing, not necessarily being spatially located in the same region. For a discussion of the compresence of tropes in the context of a theory which is friendly to DC-T, see Paul (2010).

[17] Possessing different properties, of course, involves complexity.

they are each grounded in God. This is not a causal explanation, but it is plausible to think that it is an explanation nonetheless.

Does DC Imply God is Non-causally Dependent?

According to traditional theism, God is the most fundamental being. This absolute fundamentality is closely linked with the idea that God has aseity, since it seems to offend the divine independence for there to be something as fundamental as, or more fundamental than, God. DC may be thought incompatible with God's fundamentality, even if this is for reasons that are quite different from CIC. This would be so if God must be non-causally dependent on God's parts, or if God's parts must be equally fundamental with God—in either case, DC would be incompatible with the doctrine of divine aseity as I characterized it.[18] DC is cleared from this charge if a single kind of complexity can be found which avoids the problem. Let us focus, therefore, on DC-T. If DC-T can avoid the objection, then DC is vindicated.

One might think that tropes imply that God is not fundamental because of a kind of counterfactual or logical dependence: since they are necessary to God, if any of God's tropes did not exist, then neither would God. However, it is also true that if God did not exist, then neither would any of God's tropes. Where this counterfactual dependence obtains in both directions, it does not imply either that the entities are equally fundamental, or that one is non-causally dependent upon the other. Consider Socrates and his singleton set. Since his singleton set exists in every world where Socrates does, Socrates could not exist without his singleton set. The set could also not exist without Socrates to be its member. In this case, I think it is apparent that Socrates is more fundamental than his set (Fine 1994, p. 4). So Socrates is not non-causally dependent upon his singleton set (although it is plausible that it is non-causally dependent upon Socrates). Or consider a non-reductive type physicalist account of human minds. On this story, minds and a certain type of physical entity are necessarily only found together. Yet the physical is more fundamental on this view. So if God's tropes are also counterfactually dependent upon God, then their mutual counterfactual dependence does not preclude God's being more fundamental.

And it is easy to see that God's tropes are counterfactually dependent upon God. If God did not exist, then nothing would exist.[19] Therefore, if God did not exist, God's tropes would not. This conclusion can also be supported by more general argument. It is plausible that tropes are individuated by their bearers and so cannot exist without them. Or, similarly, it is plausible to think that tropes cannot exist without their bearers since they are merely ways their bearers are. If either of these plausible notions is true,

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[18] What does it mean for something to be non-causally dependent? Something like this: the entity depended upon plays an explanatory role in the dependent entity's existence or character, but not by virtue of any causal relations. The constitution relation proposed as a response to the problem of the statue and the clay would be an example of non-causal dependence; much of the statue's character is dependent on the clay, but not because the clay caused the statue to exist.

[19] Since God has existence necessarily, if one adopts standard Lewis-Stalnaker accounts of counterpossibles, then all counterpossibles are trivially true, including the proposition that *nothing exists*. Furthermore, it seems clear that any reasonable alteration to the standard Lewis-Stalnaker account would deliver the result that, if standard theism is true, then if there were no God then nothing would exist.

then if God did not exist, God's tropes could not either. So there is mutual counterfactual dependence between God and God's tropes, and thus we cannot conclude that divine tropes threaten aseity due to counterfactual dependence. But what about other sorts of non-causal dependence?

Non-causal dependence relations such as the one between Socrates and his singleton set are often referred to as grounding relations.[20] Grounding is typically taken to be a primitive notion, although it is not clear whether the term picks out one unique relation or many (see e.g., Trogdon 2013 (2 ff), and Wilson 2014). For our purposes, we can assume that the term 'grounding' picks out any kind of non-causal dependence that goes beyond mere counterfactual dependence.

If God is grounded by God's tropes, then the doctrine of divine aseity is false. (I am assuming that being grounded is incompatible with being the most fundamental thing.) Similarly, since the doctrine of divine aseity holds that everything not absolutely identical to God is dependent on God, the doctrine is false if God's tropes are not dependent on God.

This means that DC is only consistent with divine aseity if God grounds God's tropes. After all, God could not have created the divine tropes; if God created the tropes which constituted him, then God would cause himself by virtue of causing his constituents—a vicious causal circle.[21] But grounding (in the broad sense I just specified) and causal dependence seem to be the only sorts of dependence that could exist. So if God does not cause his tropes to exist, then they must be grounded by God.

Even a non-causal dependence upon God might seem strange for God's constituents, however. Are not wholes dependent on their parts? And if so, would not each of God's tropes be more fundamental than God?

This line of thought can be tempting, but, I think, ultimately need not trouble the DC theorist. Christopher Hughes' work on Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity is helpful here. Aquinas writes that a whole is always posterior to its parts, and he presumably has some kind of grounding relation in mind (Aquinas, *ST* I.3.7, *responsio*).[22] Unfortunately, Aquinas' argument is very compressed. It is hard to know just what kind of relation Aquinas is thinking of, and why it is impossible that God be prior to his parts in that sense. Hughes has canvassed the types of priority Aquinas recognized; his list gives a good overview of the ways we might worry that God would be dependent upon any divine constituents (Hughes 1989, p. 30–36).[23]

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[20] For an influential discussion of the notion of grounding, see Fine (1994) (who introduced the previously mentioned examples of Socrates and his singleton set and non-reductive physicalism). For more examples where philosophers tend to invoke some kind of grounding relation, see Rosen (2010), p. 110–112). It is controversial what the relata of grounding relations are as follows: objects, states of affairs, or something else. I will assume that objects can ground other objects. I think divine simplicity theorists will likely be sympathetic with this view; the worry that God's constituents would ground God if divine simplicity were false seems to assume that objects can be grounds. (Thanks to Jarod Sickler for pointing at that I should discuss this issue.)

[21] This is closely related to the problem of bootstrapping for theistic activist views of God and universals. See Davidson (2012, section 3.

[22] See also Aquinas (1955-57 I.18). Anselm held a similar view; see his (1998 *Monologion* p. 17). Leftow (1990 p. 585–586) also seems to assume that a complex God's parts would not be grounded in God, since he assumes that they would be the terminus of some explanations.

[23] Hughes uses his taxonomy to try to undercut one of Aquinas' main arguments for divine simplicity, and I am broadly following his discussion. (I have left one sort of Thomistic priority, which Hughes calls existential priority, out of my discussion, since readers are unlikely to worry that God is less real than God's constituents.)

The first type of priority is one we have already discussed; Hughes calls it ontological priority, but it would be better to call it modal priority, since A is prior to B in this sense just in case A could exist without B, but not vice versa (Hughes p. 30). As noted earlier, God's constituents need not be prior to God in this sense.

Causal priority is a bit trickier. Aquinas maintains that all causes are prior to their effects (Hughes, p. 32). I have already considered whether a complex God must have an efficient cause. But as an Aristotelian, Aquinas holds that there are other sorts of causal explanations besides efficient causal ones.[24] Material and final causation do not seem to be troublesome: God's constituents need not be material, and God certainly does not exist for the sake of God's constituents. But what about formal causation?

Here I think Hughes missteps.[25] 'All it means to say [God's parts are formally prior],' he claims, 'is that there is some constituent of God … whereby God is a certain way' (Hughes, p. 35).[26] The idea seems to be that even if God is a certain way because of a constituent, this does not mean that God depends upon that constituent.

To see why this is incorrect and find a better way forward, we need to draw a distinction. There are two different ways one might understand tropes (and indeed all properties, though what I am saying is probably most plausible for properties that are not universals) and their relation to their substances. One way of doing so is to imagine the tropes as providing a kind of explanation for the way a substance is. So, for example, one could say that brick is red in virtue of its redness trope. We could call this the explanatory view. This view is at least suggested by Hughes' use of the word 'whereby,' which is similar to the expression 'in virtue of,' though I do not know if Hughes would endorse the explanatory view. Setting aside the question of whether Aquinas' forms should be understood as tropes or as something else, it seems likely that Aquinas has something like this picture in mind. It is hard to see how an advocate of the explanatory view could avoid saying that God is grounded by divine constituents. God would be dependent upon God's omnipotence trope for the way that God is, since the trope would be the explanation for God's power. This violates aseity as it was defined earlier, since aseity requires that God's character not be dependent upon anything not identical to God.

But there is another way of understanding tropes and their relation to their substances which is both defensible and allows us to avoid the problem for aseity raised by the explanatory view. We can call this other account the identity view, because according to it, tropes are identical to ways their substances are. A proponent of this view would not say that a brick is red because of its redness trope; instead, the brick's redness trope and the state of affairs of the brick's being red are identical. Tropes (on this view) are simply ways that substances are, not items which grant substances their character. On this understanding, tropes do not threaten God's aseity. God is not

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[24] In addition to the types of cause mentioned in the text, Aquinas may make use of a notion of primitive mereological priority in which all parts are by definition prior to their wholes (see Hughes (p. 33)). But there is no reason to believe God could not be posterior to God's constituents in this technical sense, since all that it means for God to be posterior in this way is just for God to have constituents. We can call this a sort of priority if we want, but it does not seem relevant to questions about ground.

[25] In the next few paragraphs, I am greatly indebted to Paul Audi and Caleb Cohoe for helpful discussion and feedback.

[26] Hughes speculates that Aquinas would counter that this kind of priority involves potency, and God can have no potency. See Hughes (1989 p. 41–50) for a discussion of that charge, which would take us too far afield.

dependent upon God's omnipotence trope for the way God is, for the way God is (that is, powerful) just is God's omnipotence trope.[27]

The identity view is, I think, plausible, and it allows us to avoid an unnecessary distinction between tropes and ways their substances are. Yet one might worry about the identity view for the following reason. Tropes are introduced into ontologies because they do philosophical work. If they do not explain the way their bearers are, then what philosophical work do they do?

Fortunately, for the identity theorist, there is still plenty of work for tropes to do. They can explain facts about resemblance. Two apples are similar in color by virtue of their being colored—that is, their color tropes—and not by virtue of their shape. Similarly, a massive object's power to attract other objects to it is a little bit like God's power, in a way that it is not like God's knowledge; it is similar to God by virtue of their power tropes, but not by virtue of God's knowledge trope. Tropes can also provide truthmakers for propositions. For example, an apple's color trope can be a truthmaker for the proposition that the apple is red. Similarly, God's omnipotence trope could be the explanation for true propositions about God's power. The particulars of what tropes are called on to do vary from theory to theory, of course. The point here is just that there are reasons to think that tropes are still useful on the identity view. (That the view allows such work to be done by tropes speaks in its favor; and the fact that it is natural to want something to do the sorts of work just described reinforces the point made earlier about the desirability of alternatives to divine simplicity.)

We have examined several possible types of priority. Here is the moral: it is not at all clear that God's constituents must be more fundamental than God. The compatibility of aseity and DC-T are, to that extent, vindicated.

Of course, even if God's constituents are not more fundamental than God, that does not mean that God's constituents are not as fundamental as God; and that would also be problematic. But a prominent way of thinking about certain kinds of wholes, especially living beings, suggests that it is not so strange for a whole to ground its parts. This view goes back at least to Aristotle, and has been put to use in projects in contemporary metaphysics.[28] The parts of the animal are posterior to their whole, Aristotle said, because they are what they essentially are (that is, contributors to the complete life of the animal) only through the whole. As Hegel writes in this regard:

> The limbs and organs for instance, of an organic body are not merely parts of it: it is only in their unity that they are what they are … These limbs and organs become mere parts, only when they pass under the hands of an anatomist, whose occupation be it remembered, is not with the living body but with the corpse. (Hegel, quoted in Shaffer (2010b, p. 343))

If a living body is prior to its limbs, then this is an example of a whole which grounds its parts.

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[27] The identity view seems to be a part of the theories in Heil (2012 p. 15) and Lowe (2006 90). I should note that the identity view does *not* say that tropes are identical to their substances *simpliciter*, only to ways that their substances are.

[28] See, for a good compressed discussion of the history, Shaffer (2010a p. 47). Although Aquinas acknowledges an Aristotelian kind of priority of wholes over parts (Hughes 1989 p. 31), he does not seem to apply this to his discussion of divine simplicity—which is all the more odd since God has been traditionally seen as the most truly living being.

This is of course an example of final causation; I am suggesting that God's constituents are less fundamental than God because they have God as their final cause in something like the way that limbs have their animal as their final cause.[29] It may seem strange to think of final causation in this context. For one thing, the examples of final causation just mentioned involve physical parts of animals, like limbs, not metaphysical parts like tropes. For another, one might think that final causation always involves some sort of potentiality and change.[30] I want to avoid, if possible, the implication that God has potentiality or undergoes change (if for no other reason than to see how much of the typical divine simplicity theorist's conception of God could be kept if simplicity were rejected). And I definitely do not want DC-T to imply that God has physical parts. But I do not think that these things follow from the claim that God grounds God's parts through final causation. Although it is true that physical parts are the standard examples of the final causation of parts by a whole, the relationship between plausible divine constituents and God is relevantly similar to these examples: for instance, God's power exists for the sake of God—for the sake of the divine life as a whole, rather than the other way around. And there is nothing about being for the sake of something else which implies any potentiality or change.

One might also object by claiming that the fact that a whole is the final cause of its parts does not imply that the whole grounds its parts. Perhaps Aquinas would endorse this objection, which might explain why (to my knowledge) he never discussed the idea. But it is natural to think that if B exists for the sake of A, then A is more fundamental than B. A might not be temporally or causally prior to B. But temporal or causal priority is not necessary for grounding.

All this suggests that DC-T is compatible with divine aseity: it is at least arguable that God is more fundamental than God's constituents not by virtue of causing them, but by grounding them, perhaps by way of final causation.

However, the trope theorist need not merely play defense. In the remainder of this section I will argue that, if DC-T is true, then God's tropes do not ground God. Hence, if God is fundamental, despite having parts, then the claim that divine aseity requires divine simplicity because a complex God would be dependent on his parts is false. Here, then, is my argument, followed by a defense of its premises:

1. Either God or God's parts are fundamental. (Premise)
2. If God's parts are fundamental, then they have necessary existence per se. (Premise)
3. God's parts do not have necessary existence per se. (Premise)
∴ 4. God's parts are not fundamental. (2, 3)
∴ 5. God is fundamental. (1, 4)

Premise 1 should be uncontested; the objection that divine simplicity theorists want to press is that a composite God could not be fundamental because God's parts would

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[29] The analogy with limbs is worth emphasizing, since theists often claim that all created beings have God as their final cause as well. But what is meant by this may be subtly different than the claim that a part of a living thing has the whole as its final cause. I have no view on whether these two putative instances of final causation are importantly different from one another, but if they are, I suspect that the dependency of God's constituents would be more like the latter than the former.

[30] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to address this idea.

be fundamental, so they should agree that only God and God's parts are in the running for fundamentality.

My defense of premise 2 proceeds in two stages: first, if God's parts are fundamental, then they must exist necessarily, and second, if they both exist necessarily and are fundamental, then they have necessary existence per se (that is, from themselves rather than from something else). In defense of the first stage, consider that if God's parts are fundamental, then they depend on nothing else for their existence. If they depend on nothing else for their existence, then nothing could prevent their existence, and it is plausible to think that something whose existence could not have been prevented exists necessarily. As for the second stage, a problem arises if we suppose that fundamental things do not possess their existence in their own right, because then they would need to exist by virtue of something else, which is inconsistent with being fundamental. So if God's parts are fundamental, then they have necessary existence per se.[31]

Premise 3 claims that the consequent of this conditional if false. God's parts do not have their existence per se; instead, they exist necessary only by virtue of the necessary existence of the substance they jointly compose. The evidence for this is especially clear when we consider divine tropes. Consider a particular putative divine trope, such as God's omniscience. It just does not seem like the sort of thing which must exist, considered by itself in abstraction from its bearer. (This is likely partly because tropes seem to require substances to individuate them.) I suspect this holds for all parts we might reasonably think God has, but all my argument requires is that it hold for some contenders for divine parts, such as tropes.

So the divine parts postulated by DC-T do not seem to be capable of supplanting God's role as the most fundamental entity. We can conclude that God's aseity is not threatened by complexity—at least, not by complexity involving tropes. DC-T, and thus also DC, are thereby vindicated.

Simplicity and Sovereignty

Doctrines of divine sovereignty provide a different sort of objection to divine simplicity.[32] As I previously remarked, to think of God as causing the existence of the divine tropes that constitute God would involve a vicious circle. So God could not cause the existence of God's tropes, and thus, though God might ground everything not identical to himself, God could not be the cause of everything non-identical to himself.

This may seem disturbing. If so, I think it is most likely because it is thought to involve a problematic restriction on God's sovereignty. We can sketch the notion of sovereignty by saying that X is sovereign over Y just in case Y is under X's control. Control is a tricky notion, but it seems safe to say that if Y is under X's control, this implies that if X acted differently,

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[31] It has been suggested to me that existence per se just is being ungrounded. I am open to this idea. Be that as it may, however, it is less obvious that *necessary* existence per se is the same thing as being ungrounded, and it is necessary existence per se that I want to argue that God's parts lack—hence the argument in this paragraph.

[32] This fact has sometimes been obscured by discussions which consider aseity and sovereignty together. Plantinga considers the chief motivation for simplicity to be the 'sovereignty-aseity intuition' (e.g., 94), and thinks that the intuition really requires that everything be under God's control (as opposed to merely requiring that God not be dependent on anything). McCann (2012) takes a similar line. I suspect that aseity and sovereignty are sometimes considered together because they are both seen as aspects of God's free control over the created order.

then Y would be different in some relevant way. Lack of causality suggests a lack of control: if God does not cause his tropes, then their existence is not dependent on his will. If DC is true, then (at least some of) God's parts are not under God's control. I suspect that this conditional has been partly responsible for the historical popularity of divine simplicity in religious traditions that emphasize divine power. In any case, the unacceptability of such a lack of divine control is Hugh McCann's objection to DC (McCann 2012, p. 217).[33] I will argue that the objection is not a good one.

One plausible way to determine how much control a being possesses is to figure out how many propositions that being could make true or false. Let us start by using this idea to see whether divine simplicity gives God any more control than DC.

Contemporary advocates of divine simplicity typically claim that God is the sole truthmaker of some truths about God.[34] Examples of such true propositions include 'God is good' and 'God is omnipotent.' These propositions are true necessarily.[35] Does God control these propositions, in the sense that God controls whether they are true or false? Suppose not. (Later I will consider the idea that God could control the truth values of such propositions by controlling his constituents, but that would not help the divine simplicity theorist here. For now, we can assume that God cannot control God's constituents.)

If God does not control such propositions as 'God is omnipotent', then there are many important truths about God over which God lacks control. So divine simplicity also places some things—the truth values of certain propositions about God—out of God's control. In fact, the two views can agree completely in the propositions over whose truth values God has control. (e.g., each may deny divine control over 'God is omnipotent,' and also over 'God has an omnipotence trope,' even if someone who endorses DC might disagree with someone who endorses divine simplicity over the truth value of the latter.) So, a simple God and a complex God would have an identical level of control over facts about themselves. If we measure God's control by the amount of propositions whose truth value God controls, then divine simplicity and DC attribute the same amount of control to God, and the divine simplicity theorist's control objection fails.

But the divine simplicity theorist may deny that we should measure God's control purely in terms of control over the truth values of propositions. Perhaps we should also see whether God has control over the existence or character of existent things. Simplicity advocates might argue that there are fewer things outside of God's control on their model, since they hold that God lacks any constituents over which God would have no control. We can call this the 'control over things' objection.

I have two replies to this objection. The first accepts that God controls less on DC than on divine simplicity, but argues that this lack of control should be unproblematic even for theists committed to a strong view of divine sovereignty. What sorts of restrictions are problematic for someone depends on their motivation for endorsing views on which God has a great deal of control. Some progress can be made without considering all possible motivations, however. It is worth emphasizing that DC does not introduce any practical limitation to God's power over the created world. Unlike, for instance, Platonism, on DC, there need be nothing other than God's constituents

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[33] Much of Plantinga's discussion also has to do with this sort of worry.

[34] See, e.g., Pruss (2008) and Brower (2009). Truth maker theory is invoked to explain how there could be many true intrinsic predications about a simple God.

[35] Indeed, it is highly plausible that the necessity of such propositions follows from divine simplicity. See, e.g., Aquinas (1947) I 9.1 for an argument for divine impassibility that could be adapted to show this.

over which God lacks control. So, those who are inclined to strong views of divine sovereignty due to their views of God's control over the created world, or over any uncreated realm outside of God, should not object to DC on sovereignty grounds.

Furthermore, if DC is true, then the divine constituents are merely aspects of God's character (that is, of what God is like). And even divine simplicity theory does not obviously allow God to control God's character, leaving it unclear whether there are any substantive differences over God's control between DC and divine simplicity theory. So, anyone who thinks that God does not control his own character does not get any obvious reason from this belief to reject DC. Given all this, the burden is on objectors to DC on sovereignty grounds to explain why the sort of restrictions on God's control that DC implies give us any reason to reject DC.

My second response to the 'control over things' objection is independent of the first, and challenges the contention that God must lack control over God's constituents. Why should we think that God lacks such control? One might think so because they exist necessarily. But God might have control over them even if they exist necessarily. To see this, consider the distinction between physical and moral ability.[36] I am physically able to smash my coworker's computer, since I have control over my bodily movements and sufficient tools and strength to use those movements to destroy the computer. But since doing so would be morally wrong, I would not, in the popular phrase, 'be able to bring myself' to do so. I am physically able but morally unable.

Similarly, God might have the power required for control over the divine constituents. God might be able to alter his character; or, if all God's constituents are essential to God, to commit deicide through the removal of one or more of them. But it seems likely that such actions would go against God's moral character. (Consider: if God is perfect, then change would make God imperfect, which is *prima facie* wrong.) And if we assume that God (being essentially perfect) would necessarily never act against God's moral character, then there is no possibility that God would act in such ways. Now, if there is no possibility of something occurring, then there is no broadly logical possible world where the thing occurs; and if there is no broadly logical possible world where something fails to exist, then that thing exists necessarily. So even if God's constituents exist necessarily, this is compatible with God's having control over their existence. In that case, DC need not imply that there are things over which God lacks control.

There are a few objections that should be addressed at this point.[37] First, one might think that, for all I have said, God does not really exist necessarily on this view, since God has the natural power to commit deicide.[38] I think that this objection assumes that, for all X, if God has the natural power to do X, there is a possible world in which X obtains. But I do not think we need to make this assumption. It might be that all the worlds in which X obtains are impossible.[39] In this case, that would be because it is morally impossible for God to commit deicide.

Here is a second objection. One might think that it is just implausible that God exists necessarily because God could not bear to commit deicide. I am not sure about this, but I think I share at least some sense of the implausibility here, in that a 'merely' moral necessity

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[36] I would like to thank Paul Audi for suggesting that this distinction could be useful in this context.

[37] I would like to thank two anonymous referees for encouraging me to address the first two objections here.

[38] By 'natural power' I just mean the power to do something apart from any moral considerations. God has the natural power to do wrong, though God would never do so.

[39] For discussion of impossible worlds, see Berto (2013).

arguably makes God's necessary existence a bit less impressive. To the extent that this implausibility is moving, though, it should also lead us to find my first response to the 'control over things' objection to be very plausible. That response, recall, said that a lack of control over God's constituents would not be theologically problematic. If control over God's constituents would make God's necessary existence less impressive, that suggests to me that control over God's constituents is not a valuable sort of control to have. And it should not be theologically problematic to claim that God lacks what would not be valuable for God to have.

Finally, a critic could object that I am not capable of smashing the computer, and God is not capable of altering the divine constituents, because in each case, we are morally incapable. If that is the case, the critic might continue, then God would not have control over the divine constituents. I am prepared to grant that there is a sense in which that is true; if we are talking in terms of each agent's 'morally live options,' neither course of action is genuinely open to the agent. But I don't think that this raises any sovereignty worries for DC. After all, God is morally incapable of acting in morally wrong ways, but this is not typically taken as a problematic limitation on God's control; and if God is morally unable to alter his constituents than this is just another morally wrong thing that God is incapable of, and hence not an objectionable restriction of God's control.

The upshot of all this is that it is plausible that the addition of divine constituents makes no difference in what God has control over. On one conception of control, on which control is a matter of being able to make propositions true or false, God has just as much control on DC as on divine simplicity. If we instead consider control over things, then there is room to hold that God does have control over the divine constituents; and even if God does not, it is far from clear that theists who endorse strong views of divine sovereignty should regard this as problematic. So divine sovereignty does not seem to give us particularly good reasons to reject DC.

Conclusion

I have examined several motivations for divine simplicity, all based on religious notions of God's aseity or sovereignty. None of them, I have argued, is compelling. Along the way, I have had to make a number of metaphysical assumptions about which much more could be said. So I do not take it that opponents of simplicity are completely in the clear when it comes to God's aseity or sovereignty. I take it that I have shown, though, that aseity or sovereignty by themselves do not imply divine simplicity unless supplemented by contentious metaphysical claims, claims that can reasonably be rejected.

If God is complex, this raises a number of interesting metaphysical issues. Is God composed exclusively of tropes? Or does God contain a substratum of some sort? Are there interesting relations among God's parts? In what ways is God's complexity like and unlike that of various created things? The historical popularity of divine simplicity has kept such questions from being asked. If the motivations for divine simplicity are questionable, then intriguing issues open up for our consideration.

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