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## Simplicity or Priority?

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## 1. Introduction

I begin with a tale of two philosophical views that fell on hard times during the twentieth century. One was described as ‘hogwash’ (Martin, 1976, 40) and ‘plainly self-contradictory’ (Smith, 1988, n. 13), with critics claiming both that ‘its hold on some people’s minds testifies to’ their lack of ‘intellectual coherence’ (Smith, 1988, nt. 13) and that ‘[t]aken at face value, [it] seems entirely unacceptable’ (Plantinga, 1980, 53). The other was roundly criticized by detractors who claimed that it conflicts with common sense (Russell, 1985, 36), is ‘nonsensical’ (Ayer, 1952, 146), and ‘is inconsistent with something that appears to be an evident datum of experience’ (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, 1997, 78).

The first is the doctrine of divine simplicity, historically a well-accepted view in Judaeo-Christian theology that has counted Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas among its adherents.<sup>1</sup> The second, monism, was also quite popular historically, as the following passages from William James and C. E. M. Joad indicate:

A certain abstract monism, a certain emotional response to the character of oneness, as if it were a feature of the world not coordinate with its manyness, but vastly more excellent and eminent, is so prevalent in educated circles that we might almost call it part of philosophic common sense. (James, 1991, 59)

During the last century monistic idealism commanded a larger measure of agreement among philosophers than has been accorded to any other philosophy since the Middle Ages. (Joad, 1957, 428)

<sup>1</sup> I discuss Anselm and Aquinas’s reasons for endorsing the doctrine of divine simplicity in §2, where I also address Augustine’s position in n. 3.

Here I employ elements of Jonathan Schaffer's (2010) recent defence of monism to develop an alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity and argue that it is viable. In §2, I appeal to passages by Anselm and Aquinas to identify the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity and to further set the stage for the subsequent two sections. Then, in §3, I employ an analogy with Schaffer's distinction between two types of monism to introduce a view I call 'the doctrine of divine priority'. I argue that the doctrine of divine priority is an *alternative* to the doctrine of divine simplicity in §4 by showing that it is consistent with the traditional motivation for the latter. I complete my main argument in §5, where I consider potential objections to the doctrine of divine priority and argue that its proponents can reasonably respond to these objections, thereby showing that it is a *viable* alternative. In closing, I reiterate my main conclusions and illustrate the doctrine of divine priority's potential to illuminate traditional theological problems by briefly discussing a solution to the Problem of the Trinity it affords.

## 2. Whence Simplicity?

There is broad agreement that the doctrine of divine simplicity has traditionally been motivated by reflection on aseity, a property that Judaeo-Christian theology has customarily taken to be one of the divine attributes.<sup>2</sup> To hold that aseity is one of the divine attributes is to maintain that God exists *a se*, or completely 'from himself'. Or, in other words, it is to take God to be an absolutely independent being—a being that does not depend on anything else for its existence.

This account of the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity is supported by the following passages in which Anselm and Aquinas, respectively, argue in favor of that doctrine:

So the supreme nature [i.e. God] is many good things [e.g. just, wise, beautiful, etc., as stated in *Monologion* 16]. Is it then a composite of these many good things? Or is it not rather one good thing, signified by many names? A composite requires, for its existence, its components and owes its being what it is to them. It is what it is through them. They, however, are not what

<sup>2</sup> Plantinga (1980), Stump and Kretzmann (1985), and Vallicella (1992, 2010) all agree with this account of the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity. Even

they are through it. A composite, therefore, just is not supreme. If, then, the supreme nature is a composite of many goods, what belongs to a composite necessarily belongs to it also. But truth's whole and already manifest necessity destroys and overthrows by clear reason this, falsehood's blasphemy. (Anselm, *Monologion* 17)

The absolute simplicity of God can be shown in many ways. First, from the previous articles of this question. For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since he is not a body; nor composition of form and matter; nor does his nature differ from his *suppositum*; nor his essence from his being; neither is there in him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is in no way composite, but altogether simple. Secondly, because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being, as has been shown above. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.3.7)<sup>3</sup>

Anselm and Aquinas's arguments in these passages both appear to be based on an appeal to God's aseity. At a general level, both arguments seem to proceed by the same sort of reasoning: God is noncomposite because composites depend on their components for their existence and

Brower (2009), who appears to disagree with the aforementioned authors on many issues concerning the doctrine of divine simplicity, agrees.

<sup>3</sup> In his discussion of the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity, Brower (2009) quotes from this passage by Aquinas, which (like me) he interprets as expressing an argument from aseity to simplicity. In addition, he quotes the following passage by Augustine (though he employs a different translation):

But God is truly called in manifold ways, great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatsoever other thing seems to be said of him not unworthily: but His greatness is the same as His wisdom; for He is not great by bulk, but by power; and His goodness is the same as His wisdom and greatness, and His truth is the same as all those things; and in Him it is not one thing to be blessed, and another to be great, or wise, or true, or good, or in a word to be Himself. (*On the Trinity* 6.7.8)

Brower asserts that this passage commits Augustine to the doctrine of divine simplicity. In this, he seems to be (more or less) correct. This passage (like other passages in Augustine's work) appears to commit Augustine to the doctrine of divine simplicity (or, at least, to a related view). Brower additionally claims that Augustine's remarks are 'inspired by the very same considerations' as the remarks in the passage by Aquinas—i.e. by considerations concerning God's aseity. However, he cites no evidence for this claim. Furthermore, I find insufficient evidence to endorse it, since (i) the text surrounding the passage by Augustine does not concern God's aseity and (ii) after a thorough search, I have been unable to find *any* passage in Augustine's works that clearly connects God's aseity to his simplicity. Note, however, that this is not to say that Augustine has a *different* motivation for endorsing the doctrine of divine simplicity (and hence it is not to say that Brower and I are mistaken in identifying God's aseity as the traditional motivation for that doctrine), since I have also been unable to find *any* clear motivation for that doctrine in Augustine's works.

God does not depend on anything else for his existence (i.e. he exists *a se*). More specifically: an appeal to God's aseity appears to underlie Anselm's inference from his claim that '[a] composite requires, for its existence, its components' to his (implicit) conclusion that God is not a composite of the 'many good things' God is. And Aquinas's derivation of '[t]he absolute simplicity of God' from his claims that 'every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them' and that 'God is the first being' also looks to involve an appeal to God's aseity.

It appears, then, that God's aseity is the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity. This account of the traditional motivation for that doctrine plays an important role in my argument in the remainder of this chapter, since given this account, showing that a view is an alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity merely requires showing that the view is consistent with God's aseity.<sup>4</sup> And in §4, this is precisely what I show of the view I introduce in §3.

Now to use the passages by Anselm and Aquinas to do some further stage-setting. Since Anselm and Aquinas argue in favour of the doctrine of divine simplicity in those passages, closer examination of the passages suggests formulations of that doctrine and of the argument from God's aseity to that doctrine. In that vein, consider the following reconstruction of Anselm and Aquinas's reasoning:

God exists *a se*; that is, he does not depend on anything else for his existence ('A composite requires, for its existence, its components... A composite, therefore, is just not supreme[, but God is supreme]'; 'every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being'). Thus: (a) God has no proper parts<sup>5</sup> ('there is [no] composition of quantitative parts in God'), and (b) God has no properties that are distinct from him ('[God] is many good

<sup>4</sup> Actually, the view must also be concerned with the same issues as the doctrine of divine simplicity. (After all, the claim that snow is white is also compatible with God's aseity, but this does not show that claim to be an alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity.) But this poses no problems. It is clear that on any satisfactory interpretation of the passages by Anselm and Aquinas, those passages concern the relationship between God, his parts, and his properties, and hence that the doctrine of divine simplicity concerns this relationship as well. And, as we will see, the view I argue to be an alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity also concerns this relationship.

<sup>5</sup> I use 'proper part' in the standard mereological sense: *x* is a proper part of *y* = df (i) *x* is a part of *y* and (ii) *x* is distinct from *y*.

things [e.g. just, wise, beautiful, etc.), but is not] a composite of these[; instead, he] . . . is one good thing, signified by many names’).

This reconstruction suggests the following formulations of the doctrine of divine simplicity:

**The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS):** For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a part<sup>6</sup> of God or  $x$  is a property of God, then  $x$  is identical to God

and of the argument from God’s aseity to that doctrine:

1. God exists *a se*; that is, God does not depend upon anything else for his existence.
2. If God has proper parts, then God depends on something else for his existence (namely, his proper parts).
3. Therefore, God doesn’t have proper parts. [From (1) and (2)]
4. If God has properties that are distinct from him, then God depends on something else for his existence (namely, those properties).<sup>7</sup>
5. Therefore, God doesn’t have any properties that are distinct from him. [From (1) and (4)]
6. If (3) and (5), then DDS is true.
7. Therefore, DDS is true. [From (3), (5), and (6)]

I employ these formulations in the next two sections. But it should be noted that, for the purposes of this chapter, I needn’t take a stand on the accuracy of the reconstruction of Anselm and Aquinas’s reasoning nor on the correctness of the formulations of the doctrine of divine simplicity and of the argument from aseity to simplicity I have derived from that reconstruction. I make no use of the reconstruction in the remainder of the chapter. Furthermore, while DDS is somewhat plausible and quite popular as a formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity,<sup>8</sup> the

<sup>6</sup> I use ‘part’ in the standard mereological sense, according to which an entity’s parts include both its proper parts and the entity itself.

<sup>7</sup> It is not entirely clear why proponents of the argument from God’s aseity to the doctrine of divine simplicity might accept premise (4). However, the passage by Anselm *suggests* that they might accept it based on their endorsement of what Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his discussion of the doctrine of divine simplicity, calls a ‘constituent ontology’ (1991, 541ff.), a view according to which an object’s properties are (in some sense) parts of that object.

<sup>8</sup> Several writers—including Plantinga (1980), Stump and Kretzmann (1985), and Vallicella (1992, 2010)—explicitly interpret the doctrine of divine simplicity in more or less the way it is formulated in DDS.

only use I make of DDS in the remainder is as a model for the doctrine of divine priority when introducing the latter view, a use that does not require it to be a correct formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity.<sup>9</sup> Similar remarks apply, finally, to the formulation of the argument from aseity to simplicity presented above: as a formulation of that argument, it is plausible and popular,<sup>10</sup> but the only use to which I later put it is within an illustration of how a proponent of the doctrine of divine priority might respond to a particular formulation of the argument from aseity to simplicity and does not require it to be a correct formulation of that argument.

With the foundation now laid, let's move on to discussing the view I claim to be a viable alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

### 3. Simplicity and Priority

DDS, the formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity presented in the preceding section, is structurally analogous to a form of monism discussed by Jonathan Schaffer (2010). I present this form of monism here and note the structural similarities between it and DDS. I then show how simple changes to the formulation of this form of monism result in a formulation of a distinct form of monism also discussed by Schaffer and, after a brief digression concerning metaphysical dependence, I introduce the doctrine of divine priority by making the same changes to DDS.

Schaffer distinguishes between two forms of monism: existence monism and priority monism. The former is the view that there is exactly one concrete object. On this view, the concrete objects have a unique

<sup>9</sup> For similar reasons, I don't address the recent discussions of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Pruss, 2008, and Brower, 2009, which can be interpreted as endorsing an alternative formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity. In particular, for the purposes of this chapter, it doesn't matter what the correct formulation of that doctrine is, and hence it doesn't matter whether the formulation Pruss and Brower endorse (even if it is an alternative formulation) is correct. All that matters is whether the doctrine of divine priority is consistent with God's aseity and is viable. (Furthermore, I'm suspicious of interpreting Pruss and Brower as endorsing an alternative formulation. I think Pruss and Brower are best interpreted as providing an account of how divine predications can be true even if DDS is true, and hence as providing a supplement to DDS rather than an alternative formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity.)

<sup>10</sup> The writers mentioned in n. 8 all seem to take something like it to be the correct formulation of the argument from aseity to simplicity.

mereological fusion<sup>11</sup> and each of them is identical to that fusion. Thus, letting ‘U’ (short for ‘the universe’) name the fusion of all the concrete objects, this form of monism can be formulated as follows:

**Existence Monism (EM):** For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a part of  $U$ , then  $x$  is identical to  $U$ .

(I assume here that our naming ceremony was successful. In particular, I assume that there really is such a thing as the mereological fusion of all the concrete objects and that we have succeeded in naming that fusion ‘U’.)

Although there are clearly important differences between them, DDS and EM are structurally similar. To see this, remember what DDS says:

**The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS):** For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a part of God or  $x$  is a property of God, then  $x$  is identical to God.

Both DDS and EM assert that everything that satisfies a specified condition is identical to a specified object. Their differences can be explicated in terms of this similarity. First, the specified conditions are different; in DDS, the condition is being a part or a property of God, whereas in EM the condition is being a part of  $U$ . Second, the specified objects are different; the object is God in DDS, but in EM it is  $U$ .

Let’s now turn to the other form of monism discussed by Schaffer, which he calls ‘priority monism’. Like EM, priority monism assumes that the concrete objects have a unique mereological fusion,  $U$ . Unlike EM, however, it does not assert that every concrete object is identical to  $U$  and hence does not have the untoward consequence that there is exactly one concrete object.<sup>12</sup> Instead, it claims merely that  $U$  is *prior to* each of the concrete objects it has as proper parts. More precisely:

**Priority Monism (PM):** For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a proper part of  $U$ , then  $x$  depends on  $U$  for its existence.

<sup>11</sup>  $x$  is a fusion of  $y$ s if and only if each of  $y$ s is a part of  $x$  and every part of  $x$  overlaps at least one of  $y$ s (where  $x$  overlaps  $y$  if and only if  $x$  and  $y$  have a part in common).

<sup>12</sup> In the Introduction, I noted that the doctrine of divine simplicity and monism both came under heavy fire during the 20th cent. Schaffer (2010) has persuasively argued that much of the criticism of monism was the result of a misinterpretation: while its critics mistakenly believed that the view at issue in the traditional debate over monism was existence monism, it was actually priority monism. Thus, he claims, the critics’ fire failed to hit its target.

Properly understanding PM—and properly understanding the doctrine of divine priority, which I will present here—requires grasping the type of dependence that PM asserts to hold between the proper parts of U (that is, the non-maximal concrete objects) and U itself. Allow me, then, a digression concerning dependence.

It is nearly universally acknowledged by dependence aficionados that there are different sorts of dependence. An incomplete inventory would include: *causal dependence*, the type of dependence that obtains between an effect and its cause; *counterfactual dependence*, the type of dependence that obtains between x and y just in case if y hadn't existed, then x would not have existed; and *modal dependence*, the type of dependence that obtains between x and y just in case necessarily, if x exists, then y exists. None of these is the sort of dependence at issue in PM. Instead, PM is concerned with *metaphysical dependence*; according to PM, the proper parts of the universe, U, metaphysically depend on U for their existence.<sup>13</sup>

But what exactly is metaphysical dependence? And how does it differ from the other three types of dependence just mentioned? The second of these questions, it turns out, is easier to answer than the first. Metaphysical dependence differs from causal dependence because one thing may metaphysically depend on another without the second causing the first, and vice versa. On the other hand, it differs from counterfactual and modal dependence both in being more fine-grained than the latter two types of dependence and in its formal features. For example:

- a. Not everything metaphysically depends on necessarily existing abstract objects (e.g. Platonic numbers, if such there be) for its existence, but everything modally depends on necessarily existing abstract objects for its existence and everything counterfactually depends on them as well, at least given the standard semantics for counterfactuals.
- b. Metaphysical dependence is irreflexive, while counterfactual dependence and modal dependence are reflexive.
- c. Counterfactual and modal dependence are both merely antisymmetric but metaphysical dependence is asymmetric.

<sup>13</sup> For more detailed discussions of metaphysical dependence than I am able to engage in below, see Schaffer, 2009, 2010; Fine, 1994, 2001.



Just as I am my own man, so too is metaphysical dependence its own dependence relation.

Having distinguished it from other types of dependence, the further issue of whether we can give an account, or analysis, or definition of metaphysical dependence remains. Unfortunately, it is far from clear how to answer this question. For neutrality's sake, as well as to avoid digressing even further from the main topic of this chapter, I think it best to follow Schaffer (2010, 3–4) in explaining metaphysical dependence by appeal to examples and glosses. Consider Socrates and his singleton, {Socrates}. It is plausible that {Socrates} depends in some way on Socrates for its existence but that Socrates does not depend in the same way on {Socrates}. Furthermore, the type of dependence I have in mind here isn't causal (since, plausibly, Socrates doesn't cause {Socrates}), counterfactual, or modal (since Socrates counterfactually and modally depends on {Socrates} for his existence, but doesn't bear the type of dependence I have in mind here to {Socrates}). Instead, it is metaphysical dependence. The fact that {Socrates} depends in this way on Socrates for its existence can be given various glosses: the existence of {Socrates} is *grounded in* Socrates, Socrates is *prior to* the existence of {Socrates}, {Socrates} exists *in virtue of* the fact that Socrates exists, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

Enough with this. Although investigating dependence relations is an interesting and important project, it's time to return to the main topic of the chapter. I will assume that there is a relation of metaphysical dependence and that our grasp on it is sufficient to understand PM. Notice that PM is the result of making two minor changes to EM. First, PM makes use of the notion of proper parthood where EM makes use of the more general notion of parthood. Second, PM replaces the notion of numerical identity employed in EM with that of metaphysical dependence. And because of the structural similarities between DDS and EM already discussed, the very same changes can be made to the former. The result is the following alternative account of the relationship between God, his parts, and his properties:

**The Doctrine of Divine Priority (DDP):** For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a proper part of God or  $x$  is a property of God, then  $x$  depends<sup>15</sup> on God for its existence.

<sup>14</sup> See the papers by Schaffer and Fine listed in n. 13 for more examples and glosses.

<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, unless otherwise noted, 'dependence' is used as shorthand for 'metaphysical dependence' (and similarly for its cognates; e.g. 'depends' is short for 'metaphysically depends', etc.).

In the next two sections, I will argue that DDP is a viable alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

#### 4. Priority and Aseity

I noted in §2 that the doctrine of divine simplicity was traditionally motivated by reflection on God's aseity. It was thought that if God exists *a se*—that if God is an absolutely independent being, a being that does not depend on anything else for its existence—then the doctrine of divine simplicity must be true. It appears, however, that the doctrine of divine priority is also consistent with the claim that God exists *a se*.

DDP certainly does not imply that God depends on his proper parts or on his properties for his existence. If anything, since dependence is asymmetric, it implies that God does *not* depend on them. Furthermore, DDP does not entail that there is anything else upon which God depends for his existence. Hence, DDP is consistent with God's aseity.

We can also see how a proponent of DDP would object to particular formulations of the argument from aseity to simplicity. For example, consider the following formulation from §2:

1. God exists *a se*; that is, God does not depend upon anything else for his existence.
2. If God has proper parts, then God depends on something else for his existence (namely, his proper parts).
3. Therefore, God doesn't have proper parts. [From (1) and (2)]
4. If God has properties that are distinct from him, then God depends on something else for his existence (namely, those properties).
5. Therefore, God doesn't have any properties that are distinct from him. [From (1) and (4)]
6. If (3) and (5), then DDS is true.
7. Therefore, DDS is true. [From (3), (5), and (6)]

A proponent of DDP would respond as follows: DDP is true. Thus, assuming that God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him, those proper parts and properties *depend on God* for their existence. Furthermore, since dependence is asymmetric, *God does not depend* on those proper parts and properties for his existence. So, premises (2) and (4) of the argument from aseity to simplicity are false on the assumption

that God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him, and the claim that he has such proper parts and properties is consistent with the claim that he exists *a se*.

I conclude, then, that DDP is consistent with the claim that God exists *a se*. That God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him is not inconsistent with God's aseity. It *is* inconsistent with the conjunction of the claim that God exists *a se* with premises (2) and (4) of the formulation of the argument from aseity to simplicity, but a proponent of DDP may well reject these premises. One who accepts God's aseity is, therefore, under no obligation to accept the doctrine of divine simplicity, provided that she is willing to reject those premises and accept DDP. DDP is thus an alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity. In the next section, I will consider whether it is a *viable* alternative by addressing objections to its account of the relationship between God, his proper parts, and his properties.

## 5. The Plausibility of Priority

The acute reader will have noticed that, strictly speaking, the doctrine of divine simplicity (at least as formulated in DDS) and DDP are compatible. They are both true if God has no proper parts and no properties that are distinct from him.<sup>16</sup> What is distinctive about DDP is that it is consistent with the claim that God has proper parts and/or properties of that sort, while DDS is not. Thus, to show that DDP is a viable alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity, we must focus on its implications concerning the relationship between God, his proper parts, and his properties, *on the assumption* that he does have proper parts and properties that are distinct from him, and determine whether those implications are defensible; otherwise, we will merely have shown, roughly, that DDS is a viable view.

Assume, then, that God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him. DDP then implies that these proper parts and properties depend on God for their existence. But is this a defensible implication? In this section, I defend DDP from objections to this implication, arguing

<sup>16</sup> Notice that similar remarks apply to existence monism and priority monism. Both are true if the universe—the mereological fusion of all the concrete objects—has no proper parts.

that these objections rest on assumptions that a proponent of DDP can reasonably reject. While this is sufficient to show that DDP is viable, I will also argue for a stronger claim in some places: that there are independently motivated metaphysical and theological claims that, together with the assumption that God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him, actually entail the relevant implication of DDP.

It will be useful in what follows to break up the claim that God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him and each of these proper parts and properties depends on him for its existence into two separate claims:

**Implication #1 (Imp1):** God has proper parts and each of these proper parts depends on God for its existence.

**Implication #2 (Imp2):** God has properties that are distinct from him and each of these properties depends on God for its existence.

In what follows, I will first consider objections to Imp1, then objections to Imp2.

A common assumption among contemporary metaphysicians is that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence. In fact, this assumption has a long and venerable history, as the passages by Anselm and Aquinas quoted in §2 reveal. If true, this assumption is the source of a powerful objection to Imp1: A composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence. If God has proper parts, then God is a composite object. So, if God has proper parts, then God depends on these proper parts for his existence. But dependence is asymmetric. Thus, if God has proper parts, it is not the case that each of these proper parts depends on God for its existence. Therefore, it is not the case that God has proper parts and each of these proper parts depends on God for its existence; that is, Imp1 is false.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that this presentation of the argument glosses over a very important point of controversy. To see this, let *c* be a composite object and let *pps* be *c*'s proper parts. It is then unclear whether the claim that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence is to be understood as implying (a) that *c* depends collectively on *pps* for its existence, where the dependence in question is to be understood as irreducibly plural, or (b) that for all *x*, if *x* is one of *pps*, then *c* depends on *x* for its existence. (For more on irreducibly plural properties and relations, see McKay, 2006.) If that claim is to be understood in the former way, however, then the argument's appeal to the asymmetry of dependence is misplaced. After all, understood in that way, that claim does not imply that, if God has proper parts, then God depends on *each* of its proper parts for his existence.

Though it has a fine pedigree and has been widely accepted, the assumption that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence can, I claim, reasonably be denied by a proponent of DDP. Notice first that proponents of priority monism, like Schaffer (2010), deny this very assumption, holding that U, the mereological fusion of all concrete objects, is a composite object and yet that it does not depend on its proper parts for its existence. The dependence, they claim, goes the other way around.

Second, consider the following two passages from Aristotle:

[A] dead body has exactly the same configuration as a living one; but for all that is not a man. So no hand of bronze or wood or constituted in any but the appropriate way can possibly be a hand in more than name... Precisely in the same way no part of a dead body, such I mean as its eye or its hand, is really an eye or a hand. (*On the Parts of Animals* 1.1)

[I]f the parts are prior to the whole, and the acute angle is a part of the right angle and the finger a part of the animal, the acute angle will be prior to the right angle and finger to the man. But the latter are thought to be prior; for in formula the parts are explained by reference to them, and in respect also of the power of existing apart from each other the wholes are prior to the parts. (*Metaphysics* 7.10)

Although it is not entirely clear how to correctly interpret these passages, one possible interpretation takes Aristotle to be endorsing the view that a living thing does not depend on its proper parts for its existence, but instead each of a living thing's proper parts depends on that living thing for its existence. (This interpretation explains why Aristotle holds, in the first passage, that no part of a dead body is really a hand or eye: The hands and eyes that were once parts of the living thing ceased to exist when that living thing died and hence went out of existence,<sup>18</sup> since

Hence, asymmetry *by itself* will not imply that it is not the case that each of his proper parts depends on him for its existence. (The 'by itself' qualifier is important, since it may be that asymmetry has the relevant implication *when conjoined with plausible principles concerning collective dependence*. For an example of a principle concerning collective dependence, albeit one not relevant to the question at hand, see the later discussion of Imp2.) In the main text, I ignore this point of controversy, preferring to focus on whether the claim that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence can reasonably be denied by a proponent of DDP rather than on whether that claim has the implications the argument requires it to have.

<sup>18</sup> This explanation of Aristotle's position attributes to him what Fred Feldman (1992) calls 'the Termination Thesis': the view, which Feldman rejects, that a living thing goes out of existence when it dies.

they depended on the latter for their existence. It also yields a plausible interpretation of the second of the two passages: The explanation of why the parts of a living thing depend on that living thing for their existence is that ‘in formula the parts are explained by reference to’ the whole; in other words, one of the essential properties of my finger is the property of being the *part of me* that performs such-and-such a function and, for that reason, my finger depends on me for its existence.) And regardless of whether this is the correct interpretation of the passages, it seems clear that someone might reasonably hold the view in question and that one who does so must deny the general claim that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence.<sup>19</sup>

Let me pause briefly to consider an objection. The objector speaks:

It’s *not* clear that someone might reasonably hold this Aristotle-inspired view concerning the proper parts of living things. In fact, given the current state of our scientific knowledge, it would be *positively unreasonable* to hold that view. Consider some actual living cat, Felix, and one of the electrons that is among Felix’s proper parts. Call this electron ‘Ellie’. According to the Aristotle-inspired view, each of Felix’s proper parts depends on Felix for its existence. So, if that view is true, then Ellie depends on Felix for its existence. But that’s absurd. Therefore, the Aristotle-inspired view is false.

In response to this objection, I say: Fair enough. I’ll concede, at least for the sake of argument, that given the current state of our scientific knowledge, it would be unreasonable to hold the Aristotle-inspired view. However, that view is stronger than either Aristotle or I need. All that is needed is the weaker claim that each of the *functional* proper parts of a living thing depends on that living thing for its existence, where (roughly speaking) a functional proper part is a proper part of a living thing such that being the sort of proper part it is involves performing a certain function in a living thing. (Thus, for example, your hand is a functional proper part of you

<sup>19</sup> Schaffer (2010) quotes the second of the two passages and accepts roughly the interpretation of it that I have suggested. He then uses this interpretation to support the claim, essential to his priority monism, that a whole may be prior to its proper parts. He also quotes the following passage from Hegel, which suggests that the latter may have held a similar view:

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. (1975, 191)

because being a hand involves performing a certain function in a living thing.) Call this claim ‘the revised Aristotle-inspired view’. The revised Aristotle-inspired view is all Aristotle needs: Nowhere does he claim that each and every one of the proper parts of a living thing depends on that living thing for its existence; he simply appeals to examples, each of which can plausibly be taken to be an example of a functional proper part of a living thing. It is also all I need, since it *does* seem clear that someone might reasonably hold the revised Aristotle-inspired view and that one who does so must deny the general claim upon which the objection to Imp1 rests: that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence.

Now it seems to me that priority monism and the revised Aristotle-inspired view just discussed can each reasonably be endorsed. Furthermore, since endorsing either requires denying the assumption that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence, a proponent of either of these two views can reasonably deny that assumption. But then there seems to be no reason why a proponent of DDP couldn’t also reasonably deny the assumption in question, thus affording her with a response to the objection to Imp1.

Let me be clear about what I am claiming here. I am *not* claiming that *only* those who endorse priority monism or the revised Aristotle-inspired view concerning the proper parts of living things can reasonably deny the assumption in question and hence that only a proponent of DDP who endorses one of these two views can respond to the objection to Imp1 by denying that assumption. I’m not claiming this for two reasons. First, because a proponent of DDP ought *not* endorse priority monism, at least if she wishes to maintain that God exists *a se*, since priority monism and the claim that God exists *a se* are incompatible.<sup>20</sup> Second, because the claim is false and I prefer not to make false claims. What my discussion of priority monism and the revised Aristotle-inspired view shows is that the assumption that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence is *reasonably rejectable*: someone might have good reasons to reject it, reasons stronger than the reasons they have to accept it. And I believe that even a proponent of DDP who accepts neither priority

<sup>20</sup> Or, at least, they are incompatible under the assumptions that God is a concrete object and that he is not identical to U. For given these assumptions, God is a proper part of U and hence priority monism implies that God depends on U for his existence; but the claim that God exists *a se* just is the claim that God doesn’t depend on anything else for his existence.

monism nor the Aristotle-inspired view concerning the proper parts of living things could have stronger reasons to reject that assumption than to accept it and thus could reasonably reject it in replying to the argument against Imp<sub>1</sub>.<sup>21</sup>

That said, I now wish to argue for a stronger claim: the revised Aristotle-inspired view can actually be used to argue in favour of Imp<sub>1</sub>. Suppose that God has proper parts. It is plausible that each of these proper parts is such that being the sort of proper part it is involves performing a certain function in God. So if God is a living thing, it is plausible that each of God's proper parts is a functional proper part of God. Thus, given the revised Aristotle-inspired view, if God is a living thing, it is plausible that each of God's proper parts depends on God for its existence. But that God is a living thing is a plausible, and independently motivated, theological claim. Thus Anselm writes:

[C]learly any good thing that the supreme nature is, it is that thing supremely. It is, therefore, supreme essence, *supreme life*, supreme reason... (*Monologion* 16, my emphasis)

And Aquinas asserts that:

It is said of God that He is life itself, and *not only that He is a living thing*... Since, then, God is not composed of matter and form, He must be His own Godhead, His own Life, and *whatever else is so predicated of Him*. (*Summa Theologica* 1.3.3, my emphasis)<sup>22</sup>

It is clear that, among the many claims made in these passages, one is that life—supreme life, even!—can be truly predicated of God: God is a living thing. Thus, although a proponent of DDP needn't accept the revised Aristotle-inspired view concerning a living thing and his proper parts to reasonably reject the assumption on which the argument against Imp<sub>1</sub> rests, one who does so and who also accepts that God is alive may use these claims to provide independent support for Imp<sub>1</sub>, the claim that

<sup>21</sup> Consider e.g. someone who thinks that the best solution to the Problem of the Trinity involves holding that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are proper parts of God, but who also maintains that God exists *a se*. (See the solution to the Problem of the Trinity discussed in the Conclusion.)

<sup>22</sup> In this passage, Aquinas also seems to be asserting that each of God's properties is identical to God and thus to be endorsing part of DDS. However, I take it that the claim that God is a living thing and the claim that each of his properties are identical to him are independent claims and that one might accept the former while rejecting the latter.



God has proper parts and each of these proper parts depends on God for its existence.

I turn now to Imp2. Imp2, remember, is the claim that God has properties that are distinct from him and each of these properties depends on God for its existence. Why might one object to Imp2? Well, one who holds an extreme Platonist conception of properties according to which they are substances (in the sense that none of them depends on anything else for its existence) will think that Imp2 is false. But such a conception of properties isn't the only reasonable one available. One might, instead, adopt an Aristotelian conception of properties. According to this conception, properties are not independently existing entities (unlike God, they do not exist *a se*). Instead, they depend on the particulars that instantiate them for their existence.<sup>23</sup>

Other than the Platonist conception of properties discussed, the only other grounds I can think of on which to object to Imp2 involve accepting what Wolterstorff 1991 calls a 'constituent ontology'.<sup>24</sup> A constituent ontology holds that something's properties are (in some sense) parts of it. Thus, according to a constituent ontology, if God has properties that are distinct from him, then God is a composite object that has those properties as proper parts. Thus, one who accepts a constituent ontology and also holds that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence, rather than the other way around, would have grounds for objecting to Imp2. However, these grounds would rely on the assumption that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence, and I have shown that a proponent of DDP can reasonably reject that assumption. I conclude, then, that a proponent of DDP can reasonably reject both the Platonist conception of properties on which the first objection to Imp2 relies and a key assumption of the second objection.<sup>25</sup>

Now I mentioned that one who accepts an Aristotelian conception of properties can reasonably reject the Platonist conception on which the first

<sup>23</sup> This conception is named, of course, after Aristotle, who held that universals exist *in re*. A prominent contemporary proponent of an Aristotelian conception of properties is D. M. Armstrong (1989), who also endorses the related Principle of Instantiation: the view that there are no uninstantiated properties.

<sup>24</sup> Constituent ontologies are also discussed in n. 7.

<sup>25</sup> The second objection to Imp2 also relies on the assumption that a constituent ontology is true. This assumption can also reasonably be rejected by a proponent of DDP, since there are other reasonable views concerning the relationship between an object and its properties.

objection to Imp2 relies. But just as I emphasized that a proponent of DDP needn't endorse priority monism or the revised Aristotle-inspired view in order to reasonably reject the assumption on which the objection to Imp1 relied, so too I want to emphasize that a proponent of DDP needn't endorse an Aristotelian conception of properties in order to reasonably reject a Platonist conception of properties. Aristotelian conceptions of properties have the implication that the property *being a cat* depends on the cats for its existence, and I see no reason to think that a proponent of DDP must endorse *that* claim in order to reasonably reject a Platonist conception of properties. A proponent of DDP might, for instance, simply hold that, while properties do not generally depend on the particulars that instantiate them for their existence, all properties do depend on God for their existence. There is no reason, I think, why a proponent of DDP couldn't reasonably hold this view and thus no reason why she couldn't reject a Platonist conception of properties on that basis.<sup>26</sup>

Although a proponent of DDP can reasonably reject the Platonist conception of properties on which the first argument against Imp2 relies *without* endorsing an Aristotelian conception of properties, I now wish to point out that a proponent of DDP who *does* endorse an Aristotelian conception of properties can use that conception to provide independent support for Imp2. Consider again what an Aristotelian conception of properties says: that each property depends on the particulars that instantiate it for its existence. The dependence in question here is irreducibly plural.<sup>27</sup> In other words, it is not the case that a property depends on each of the particulars that instantiate it for its existence. Rather, it depends collectively on the particulars that instantiate it for its existence.

<sup>26</sup> Readers who are worried that properties are necessary existents and that necessary existents cannot depend on anything else for their existence, including God, should see the discussion later in this section of a similar worry concerning the view that {God} depends on God for its existence.

<sup>27</sup> See also n. 17, which also contains a discussion of irreducibly plural dependence. Note the claim that the dependence of a property on the particulars that instantiate it is irreducibly plural is consistent with the claim that a property depends on a single particular if only one particular instantiates it. It simply implies that if more than one particular instantiates a property, then the property depends collectively on those particulars rather than depending on them individually. Also note that in addition to being irreducibly plural, the dependence in question is *generic*. In other words, though a property in fact depends collectively on certain particulars (namely, those that instantiate it) for its existence, it needn't have. Had some other particulars instantiated it, it would have instead depended on those particulars for its existence. See Thomasson, 1999, for a relevant discussion of different sorts of dependence.

How, then, can an Aristotelian conception of properties be used to provide independent support for Imp2? If such a conception said that a property depends on *each* of the particulars that instantiate it for its existence, it would follow immediately that if God has properties that are distinct from him, each of those properties depends on God for its existence. Thus, such a conception together with the claim that God has properties that are distinct from him would entail Imp2. We have just seen, however, that an Aristotelian conception of properties *doesn't* say that. Thus, to repeat (in stronger terms): just what gives with my claim that such a conception can be used to provide independent support for Imp2?

To see what gives, let's consider an example. God instantiates the property *being good*, as do certain other particulars.<sup>28</sup> For the sake of illustration, consider a situation in which the only particulars that instantiate that property are God, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi. Then, according to an Aristotelian conception of properties, *being good* depends collectively on God, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi for its existence. But each of Mother Teresa and Gandhi depends on God for her or his existence. If, however, *being good* depends collectively on God, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi for its existence and each of Mother Teresa and Gandhi depends on God for her or his existence, then it would seem that *being good* depends on God for its existence, period. (The claim made in the preceding sentence is justified by the same intuition that justifies the claim that dependence is transitive: if the antecedent of that claim is true, then although God, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi are, collectively, the immediate grounds for the existence of *being good*, its ultimate ground is simply God himself.) Thus, given

<sup>28</sup> Some philosophers hold that when we say 'God is good' and 'Mother Teresa is good', there is no single property that we are truly attributing to both God and Mother Teresa. Instead, they say, when we use the same predicate to describe both God and one of his creatures, we are using that predicate 'analogously', as there are no properties shared by God and his creatures. (See Pruss, 2008, which contains a contemporary endorsement of such a view.) In the text, I ignore this view, which I find rather strange. However, *if* the view is true, so much the better for me, I say. For this view has the implication that if God has any properties that are distinct from him, then he is the only particular that has those properties. And that implication, together with an Aristotelian conception of properties and the claim that God has properties that are distinct from him, entails that God has properties that are distinct from him and each of those properties depends on God for its existence, which is exactly what Imp2 says. Thus, rather than constituting an objection to my claim that an Aristotelian objection of properties can be used to provide independent support for Imp2, this view is consistent with that claim and, in fact, makes it easier to show that claim to be true.

an Aristotelian conception of properties, *being good* depends on God for its existence in the situation being considered for the sake of illustration.

The moral of our simple story is easily generalizable. The claim that if *being good* depends collectively on God, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi for its existence and each of Mother Teresa and Gandhi depends on God for her or his existence, then *being good* depends on God for its existence, is simply an instance of the following general principle:

A Principle Concerning Dependence (PCD): For all  $x$  and  $y$  and for any  $z$ s, if  $x$  depends on  $z$ s for its existence and each of  $z$ s is either identical to  $y$  or depends on  $y$  for its existence, then  $x$  depends on  $y$  for its existence.

And this principle, I claim, is supported by the same intuitions that support the claim that dependence is transitive. But together with the claim that God has properties that are distinct from him, an Aristotelian conception of properties, and the independently theologically motivated claim that every particular other than God depends on God for its existence, PCD entails that God has properties that are distinct from him and that each of these properties depends on God for its existence. Thus, a proponent of DDP can use an Aristotelian conception of properties and the claim that God has properties that are distinct from him, together with independently motivated metaphysical and theological claims, to provide independent support for Imp2.

Let me pause briefly to address an objection to the argument for Imp2 suggested in the last paragraph. That argument claims that every particular other than God depends on God for its existence. But isn't that claim simply false? The number 4 is a particular,<sup>29</sup> but surely it does not depend on God for its existence, since it is a necessary existent and no necessary existent depends on anything else for its existence.

There are two potential responses to this objection I would like to explore. One asserts that the number 4 is not a particular. Rather, it (and every other number) is a property or a relation.<sup>30</sup> I mention this first response simply to set it aside. Although it may be true that numbers

<sup>29</sup> I am taking a particular to be a substance in one of Aristotle's senses of that word: a particular is something that can instantiate properties and relations but cannot itself be instantiated.

<sup>30</sup> John Bigelow (1988), for instance, endorses such a view concerning the nature of numbers.

are properties or relations, this response simply invites a revision of the objection. Consider {God}. Assuming that God is a necessary existent, {God} is too. But while numbers may be properties or relations, {God} is certainly a particular: {God} instantiates properties and relations but cannot itself be instantiated. Thus, if no necessary existent depends on anything else for its existence, {God} doesn't depend on anything else for its existence and hence it's not the case that every particular other than God depends on God for its existence.

My preferred response to the objection is simply to deny the claim that no necessary existent depends on anything else for its existence. In fact, the example concerning {God} lends credence to this response. Remember that when discussing the nature of metaphysical dependence in §3, I claimed that {Socrates} metaphysically depends on Socrates for its existence. But it is quite plausible that if that is so, it is also the case that {God} depends on God for its existence. I thus conclude that {God} depends on God for its existence. And I would say the same of any other alleged necessarily existing particular other than God: it too depends on God for its existence. For instance, if the number 4 is a particular rather than a property or relation, it depends on God for its existence, despite being a necessary existent. It is, in general, simply not the case that metaphysically depending on something else for one's existence is incompatible with being a necessary existent.

In the preceding section, I argued that DDP is consistent with the claim that God exists *a se*, which claim provides the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity. In this section, I defended DDP from the charge that its peculiar implications concerning the relationship between God, his proper parts, and his properties (on the assumption that God has proper parts and properties that are distinct from him) are objectionable. The upshot, I maintain, is that the main thesis of this chapter is true: the doctrine of divine priority is a viable alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the doctrine of divine priority, showed that it is consistent with the traditional motivation for the doctrine of divine simplicity, and defended it from objections. On this basis, I conclude that DDP is a viable alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Before ending the chapter, I would like to illustrate DDP's potential to illuminate traditional theological problems by briefly sketching a solution to the Problem of the Trinity that it makes available. The Problem of the Trinity consists in reconciling the apparent conflict between (at least) the following seven claims, which are widely taken to be components of the doctrine of the Trinity:<sup>31</sup>

- a. The Father is God.
- b. The Son is God.
- c. The Holy Spirit is God.
- d. The Father is not the Son.
- e. The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
- f. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- g. There is exactly one God.

According to the solution to the Problem of the Trinity that DDP makes available, 'is' in (a)–(f) is to be interpreted as the 'is' of identity. On this interpretation, however, although (d)–(g) are true, (a)–(c) are, strictly speaking, false. Neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit is identical to God. Instead, each is a proper part of God and, in accordance with DDP, each depends on God for its existence, thus preserving God's aseity.

There is, however, a plausible explanation of why (a)–(c) are attractive, despite their falsity. For the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are *functional* proper parts of God (see §5)—who is a living thing and a person—and, furthermore, each of them is also a person. Now whenever a functional proper part of a living thing does something, it is also true that the living thing in question does it (and, in fact, it may be even more appropriate to say that the living thing does it than to say that its functional proper part does). Whenever my hand grasps a pen, for example, I grasp that pen. Similarly, then, whenever the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit does something, God does it as well.

In the case of God, then, the fact that one of the three persons of the Trinity does something entails that another person, God, does it as well. Usually, however, that one person does something *does not* entail that some other person does it as well. It is our recognition of this latter fact

<sup>31</sup> Richard Cartwright (1987) endorses this understanding of the Problem of the Trinity and suggests other claims that might be added to (a)–(g).

and our illegitimate application of it to the case of God, then, that leads us to mistakenly identify the three persons of the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) with God and thereby explains the attractiveness of (a)–(c), despite the fact that they are, strictly speaking, false.

This is the promised solution to the Problem of the Trinity that the doctrine of divine priority affords.<sup>32</sup> Together with the arguments earlier in this chapter, the fact that DDP makes this solution available shows that DDP ought to be taken seriously.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A few remarks on this solution to the Problem of the Trinity and its role in the chapter are in order. (1) While this solution fits well with DDP, the latter does not entail the former; even a Christian who accepts the latter needn't endorse the former. (2) I present the solution merely as an interesting potential application of DDP (though also as an application that might motivate someone to reject the assumption that a composite object depends on its proper parts for its existence; see n. 21). I do not claim that it is the correct solution or even that it is unproblematic. Proponents of the solution would have to address extant objections to solutions to the Problem of the Trinity that take the persons of the Trinity to be proper parts of God. (See e.g. Howard-Snyder, 2003, forthcoming.) (3) One might object that since the purported solution rejects certain components of the Doctrine of the Trinity, it is not really a solution to the Problem of the Trinity. This objection relies on the assumption that a solution to the Problem of the Trinity cannot reject any components of the Doctrine of the Trinity. I find this assumption dubious. While I do not have the space here to engage in a detailed account of the conditions a position must meet to be a solution to the Problem of the Trinity, I will say this: I accept that a position that *merely* rejects components of the Doctrine of the Trinity is not a solution to the Problem of the Trinity. However, the purported solution does not merely reject components of the doctrine. As developed in the text, it also holds that proponents of the doctrine have had a reasonable (or at least reasoned) belief in these components. Furthermore, the purported solution is consistent with the claim that belief in the components it rejects has its causal origins in divine revelation, as well as with the claim that such belief is the result of reasoning from the content of such revelation. These considerations seem to me to provide some support for the claim that while the purported solution to the Problem of the Trinity presented in the text rejects components of the Doctrine of the Trinity, it is nonetheless a solution to the problem.

<sup>33</sup> Thanks to Joshua Spencer, Alex Skiles, Andrew Wake, Edward Wierenga, and audience members at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Society for Exact Philosophy.

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