

AQUINAS ON THE NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

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Abstract. I discuss what Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity is, and what he takes to be its implications. I also discuss the extent to which Aquinas succeeds in motivating and defending those (putative) implications.¹

I. WHAT IS AQUINAS' DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY?

When Aquinas avers that God is altogether simple, I take it he (simply) means that God is no way in-composite. After all, at *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia, 3, 7, Aquinas asks whether God is in any way composite (*quocumque modo compositus*) or is instead entirely simple (*totaliter simplex*), and he answers that God is altogether simple (*omnino simplex*), inasmuch as He is in no way composite.

It accordingly seems at least initially natural to think of Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity as simply:

(DS) God is a being with no proper parts ("DS" stands for "the doctrine of (divine) simplicity").

Thus understood, the doctrine of divine simplicity does not seem especially surprising or controversial (by which I mean that it does not seem more controversial than any number of other claims that imply the existence of God). Why should one have supposed that God was a being with proper parts?

If, however, Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity is not *per se* surprising or controversial, the same cannot be said about (what Aquinas takes to be) the implications of that doctrine.

For Aquinas, composition is an almost ubiquitous feature of reality, and is, in a certain sense, a completely ubiquitous feature of created reality. That is, as Aquinas sees it, every "complete" created being is composite, and every "incomplete" created being is in composition with something else, and, together with some other thing or things, jointly composes something. (In other words, for Aquinas, everything outside God is found on at least one end of the composition relation.)

Also, Aquinas that all the following theses about composition are necessary truths:

(TC₁) If a being is different from its genus, that being is composite.

(TC₂) If a being is different from its differentia, that being is composite.

(TC₃) If a being is different from its substantial form, that being is composite.

(TC₄) If a being is different from its accidental forms, that being is composite.

(TC₅) If a being is different from its essence, that being is composite.

¹ Much of the material in this paper appears in the fourth chapter of my *Aquinas on Being, Goodness and God* (Routledge, 2015). In this piece, I have streamlined the discussion of Aquinas on simplicity, but I have also in some cases extended it, developing arguments and considering new counterarguments.

(TC₆) If a being is different from its existence, that being is composite.

(TC₇) If a being is different from its perfections (from the things in virtue of which it is perfect in this or that respect), that being is composite.

Because Aquinas accepts (TC₁), (TC₂), and (TC₄) as well as (DS), he concludes that God is not different from His genus, or His differentia, or His accidental forms. Not that God and His genus, or God and His differentia, or God and His accidental forms are one and the same thing. God and His genus aren't one and the same thing, any more than they are two different things: *God and His genus are one and the same thing* and *God and His genus are two different things* are both false, inasmuch as there is such a thing as God, but there is no such thing as God's genus. (Similarly, there are no such things as God's differentia or God's accidental forms). Because Aquinas accepts (TC₃) and (TC₆) as well as (DS), he concludes that God is not different from His essence or His existence. In these cases, however, Aquinas is willing to say that God and His essence, or God and His existence are one and the same thing, since he holds that there is such a thing as God's essence, and there is such a thing as God's existence. And at least some of the time (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 3, 2, *responsio*) Aquinas is willing to say there is such a thing as God's (substantial) form, and that God and that form are one and the same thing. Finally, Aquinas holds that God and His perfections are one and the same thing. Thus God and His goodness are one and the same thing (SCG, I, 38), as are God and His wisdom, God and His power, etc.

So Aquinas endorses not just (DS) but also the following pair of claims:

(NTDT) Neither God and His genus, nor God and His differentia, nor God and His accidental forms are two different things.

(OAST) God and His essence, God and His existence, God and His substantial form, and God and His perfections (His goodness, His wisdom and so on) are one and the same thing.

“NTDT” stands for “not two different things”, and “OAST” stands for “one and the same thing”.)

Unlike (DS), (NTDT) and (OAST) are highly contentious, even on the assumption that there is a God. So, although many defenders as well as critics of Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity have said that that doctrine is, at least at first sight, especially problematic (Eleonore Stump describes it as “notoriously difficult”²), I don't find this the most perspicuous way of putting things. To my mind (Trinitarian issues aside), there isn't anything especially problematic about the Thomistic thesis that God is *omnino simplex*. The at least initially problematic theses Aquinas makes are the claims Aquinas takes to be implied by the thesis that God is *omnino simplex*—that is, (NTDT) and (OAST). And, I am inclined to think, these last claims are at least initially problematic, because the theses about composition (that is, (TC₁)–(TC₇)) that allow us to derive (NTDT) and (OAST) from the not especially problematic (DS) are themselves at least initially problematic. (Strictly speaking, (TC₁)–(TC₇) allow us to derive the problematic (NTDT) from (DS), but are insufficient to allow the problematic (OAST) therefrom: to get from (DS) to (OAST) we also need to suppose that there are such things as God's essence, God's existence, and God's perfections. But this doesn't affect the point about the relative initial unproblematicity of (DS) with respect to (NTDT) and (OAST).)

On the other hand, there is a tendency in the literature on divine simplicity to take some or all of (NTDT) and (OAST) to be part and parcel of the doctrine of divine simplicity, rather than alleged consequences of it. For example, in his entry on divine simplicity in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, William Vallicella writes:

According to the classical theism of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and their adherents, God is radically unlike creatures in that he is devoid of any complexity or composition, whether physical or metaphysical. Besides lacking spatial and temporal parts, God is free of matter-form composition, potency-act composition, and existence-essence composition. There is also no real distinction between God as subject of his attributes and his attributes. God is thus in a sense requiring clarification *identical* to each of his attributes, which implies

2 See her *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2003), 92.

that each attribute is identical to every other one. God is omniscient, then, not in virtue of instantiating or exemplifying omniscience—which would imply a real distinction between God and the property of omniscience—but by *being* omniscience. And the same holds for each of the divine omni-attributes: God *is* what he *has* as Augustine puts it in *The City of God*, XI, 10. As identical to each of his attributes, God is identical to his nature. And since his nature or essence is identical to his existence, God is identical to his existence. This is the doctrine of divine simplicity.³

The question of whether we should identify the doctrine of divine simplicity with my (DS), or identify it with a doctrine in the neighbourhood of what I shall call (DS⁺) — that is, the conjunction of (DS) with (NTDT) and (OAST) is at least partly a *quaestio de nomine*: we might irenically call my (DS) “Aquinas’ thesis of divine simplicity” and call my (DS⁺) “Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity” if we thought of the doctrine of divine simplicity as comprising both the thesis of divine simplicity, and some of its (alleged) consequences). But the contemporary literature on divine simplicity is centered on the defensibility of (DS⁺) rather than (DS), and in what follows, my primary focus will be on the former, rather than the latter.

Contemporary philosophers rarely talk about substances having forms (whether accidental or substantial); instead they talk about individuals having properties. We might accordingly wonder what the implications of (DS⁺) are for the relation between God and His properties: does (DS⁺) imply that, where *P* is any property of God, God and *P* are not two different things?

How we answer this question will depend on how we conceive of properties. It is standard in contemporary (analytic) philosophy to distinguish intrinsic properties from extrinsic properties. How exactly ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ should be defined is a matter of debate, but for our purposes it will be enough to say that intrinsic properties are typically characterized in one of two ways — either as those properties that a thing has, independently of which relations (if any) it bears to other things ‘outside of’ or ‘disjoint from’ it, or as those properties that could never vary between (actual or possible) perfect duplicates (that is, between two (actual or possible) individuals that were exactly alike). On either characterization, a property such as *being named “Domitilla”* is extrinsic. And on either characterization, *being round* is intrinsic, since a thing is round independently of the relations it bears to other things (outside of it). (I neglect complications involving relations between a round thing and the (round) region of space that round thing occupies).

It seems that (DS⁺) does not exclude that, for some extrinsic property of God *P*, God and *P* are two different things. (DS⁺) says that (a) God has no proper parts, (b) God and His genus, or His differentia, or His accidental forms are not two different things, and (c) God and His essence, God and His existence, and God and any of His perfections are one and the same thing. Since these claims don’t concern extrinsic properties, they don’t (individually or jointly) exclude that, say, *being named “God” (in English)* and *being named “Deus” (in Latin)* are two different extrinsic properties of God. If, however, *being named “God” (in English)* and *being named “Deus” (in Latin)* are two different extrinsic properties of God, at least one of them must be different from God (if *x* and *y* are two different things, and there is such a thing as *z*, then *x* and *z* are two different things or *y* and *z* are two different things (or both)).

One might think that ((DS⁺)) excludes that for some intrinsic property of God *P*, God and *P* are two different things. Again, though, ((DS⁺)) is not a thesis about properties. Hence (DS⁺) seems compatible with the thesis that there is such a property as *being divine*, and there is such a property as *being divine or being round*. Now if *being divine* and *being divine or round* are properties, they are different properties (since round things have the second property, but not the first). Moreover, both *being divine* and *being divine or round* are intrinsic properties (a being is divine, or divine or round, independently of its relations to things outside of it; two things couldn’t be perfect duplicates (exactly alike), if only one of them were divine, or only one of them were divine or round). If, however, *being divine* and *being divine or round* are different intrinsic properties, then they are different intrinsic properties of God (since He is both divine,

3 William F. Vallicella, “Divine Simplicity”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, 2018).

and divine or round). And if God has two different intrinsic properties, then at least one of those intrinsic properties must be different from God.

Of course, if “(accidental or substantial) form” and “property” were synonyms, then (DS⁺) would after all straightforwardly imply that if *P* is a property of God, then *P* and God are one and the same thing. Equally, if “(accidental or substantial) form” and “intrinsic property” were synonyms, (DS⁺) would straightforwardly imply that if *P* is an intrinsic property of God, then *P* and God are one and the same thing. But “form” and “property”, and “form” and “intrinsic property” are surely not synonyms: the meaning of the term “form” leaves room for the possibility that there are properties — and intrinsic properties — that are not forms. In particular, it leaves room for the possibility that God is both divine and divine or round, in virtue of having two different intrinsic properties, but God is not both divine and divine or round, in virtue of having two different forms.

Analogously, if a property — or an intrinsic property — were “by definition” a certain kind of (proper or improper) part of the thing that has it, then (DS) (and thus (DS⁺)) would straightforwardly imply that if *P* is a property — or an intrinsic property — of God, then *P* = God. But it does not seem to be true by definition that properties, or intrinsic properties, are (proper or improper) parts of their bearers (more on this later).

Let us say that *P* is a *temporary property* of a being *b* just it's neither the case that *b* has *P* whenever *b* exists, nor the case that *b* lacks *P* whenever *b* exists. And let us say that *P* is a *strongly contingent* property of *b* just in case *b* (exists and) has *P* but it also could have been that *b* existed and did not have *P*. (Thus *being famous* is a strongly contingent property of Barack Obama, but *existing* is not, since Barack Obama could not have existed without having the property of existence.)

Although (DS⁺) is compatible with God's having a plurality of properties, and a plurality of intrinsic properties, it does not appear to be compatible with God's having a plurality of temporary intrinsic properties, or a plurality of strongly contingent properties (Or rather, to be fussy about it, the conjunction of (DS⁺) with *there are accidental forms* appears to be incompatible with God's having a plurality of temporary intrinsic properties.) This may need a bit of explaining.

At a given time, one and the same being may be many different ways intrinsically: it may be round, solid, made of gold, and so on. But at any given time, there will be only one “complete” or “maximal” way a being is intrinsically: as I shall put it, at any given time, a being will have exactly one (*total*) *intrinsic profile*. Now, to use a bit of jargon from contemporary philosophy of mind, accidental forms are defined by their “explanatory role.” And it is part of the explanatory role of accidental forms that (if there are accidental forms, then) fixing the facts about which substantial form a (complete) immaterial being has at a given time, together with the facts about (exactly) which accidental forms that being has at that time, fixes the (total) intrinsic profile of that being at that time. (If God decides to create *this* particular (complete) immaterial being, with *this* substantial form, and (exactly) *these* accidental forms (at its first moment of existence), He doesn't need to make any further decisions about how that being will be intrinsically (at its first moment of existence).

So, suppose that an angel has temporary intrinsic properties. It follows that that angel has different intrinsic properties at different times at which it exists, and hence different (total) intrinsic profiles at different times at which it exists.

Now suppose that that angel does not have different accidental forms at different times at which it exists. Then, over the (infinite) span of time through which the angel exists, we have constancy, so far as the substantial form and (all) the accidental forms of that angel are concerned, but variation with respect to the angel's (total) intrinsic profile. This implies that fixing the facts about which substantial form some (complete) immaterial being has (at a time), together with the facts about (exactly) which accidental forms that being has (at that time) does not suffice to fix the (total) intrinsic profile of that being at that time. In other words, accidental forms are not “up to the job” of (jointly) determining (along with a substantial form) the (total) intrinsic profile of a particular immaterial being (at a time). But, as we have seen, the notion of an accidental form is defined by a functional role that includes being up to that job. Accidental forms are not defined as forms that, along with a substantial form, *contribute* to the

(total) intrinsic profile of a (complete) being (at a given time); they are defined as forms that, along with a substantial form, *fix* or *entirely determine* the (total) intrinsic profile of that being (at a given time). Forms that, along with a substantial form, only contributed to the (total) intrinsic profile of a (complete) being (at a time) could only be accidental forms of a particular kind. In which case, assuming that there are accidental forms, angels have temporary intrinsic properties only if they have different accidental forms at different times.

Pari ratiōne, assuming there are accidental forms, God has temporary intrinsic properties only if He has different accidental forms at different times. In which case (DS⁺) in conjunction with the assumption that there are accidental forms implies that God cannot have a plurality of temporary intrinsic properties (or, indeed, even one temporary intrinsic property). *Pari ratiōne quoque*, ((DS⁺) in conjunction with the assumption that there are accidental forms implies that God cannot have a plurality of strongly contingent intrinsic properties (or, indeed, even one strongly contingent intrinsic property).

If God had strongly contingent intrinsic properties, without having different accidental forms in different possible worlds, then we would have constancy across possible worlds with respect to which (substantial or accidental) forms God has, but variation (across possible worlds) with respect to God's (total) intrinsic profile: this would imply that accidental forms weren't up to doing a job that they would ("by definition") have to be up to doing, if they existed.

II. THE THOMISTIC CASE FOR (DS⁺)

Let (TI) (short for "there is ...") be the claim that there is such a thing as God's essence, and such a thing as God's existence, and such a thing as God's substantial form, and such a thing as God's *P*, where *P* is any divine perfection. (TI), (TC₁)–(TC₇), and (DS) jointly imply both (NTDT) and (OAST), and so jointly imply (DS⁺). But even assuming (TI) and (TC₁)–(TC₇), this doesn't obviously give us a reason to accept (DS⁺): why accept (DS) and hence (given (TI) and (TC₁)–(TC₇)), (DS⁺), rather than rejecting (DS⁺), and hence (given (TI) and (TC₁)–(TC₇)), (DS)?

To see how Aquinas might answer this question, it will be helpful to bring in more of Aquinas' background beliefs about God and composition. By Aquinas' lights, we know that there is a God who is a first (or uncaused) being and a necessary being. We also know that

(TC₈) Inasmuch as every composite being is "posterior to" and "dependent upon" its components, a composite being cannot be a *first* necessary being. (cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 18 and *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 3, 7).

(TC₉) Inasmuch as every composite being is at least potentially "decomposable", and potentially non-existent, a composite being cannot be a first *necessary* being. (cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 18.).

and

(TC₁₀) Every composite being is in a certain way in potentiality, inasmuch as its parts as such potentially compose a whole. But every being that is in any way in potentiality (any being that is in not pure act) is caused and contingent. So again, a composite being cannot be a first or a necessary being (see *De Potentia*, 7, 1, *responsio*).

Note that, while (TC₁)–(TC₇) say that certain conditions (difference from one's genus, or differentia, or ...) are sufficient for composition, (TC₈)–(TC₁₀), tell us that composition is sufficient for contingency and posteriority ("unfirstness"). Equivalently (given that *p* is necessary for *q* if and only if *q* is sufficient for *p*), (TC₁)–(TC₇) tell us that composition is necessary for difference from one's genus, difference from one's differentia, and so on, and (TC₈)–(TC₁₀) tell us that composition is sufficient for contingency and posteriority ("unfirstness").

Since (TC_8) – (TC_{10}) imply that all composite beings are contingent and posterior, they imply that no being that is first and necessary is composite. So *there is a God who is a first and necessary being* and (TC_8) – (TC_{10}) jointly imply that God is an incomposite being. In other words, *there is a God who is a first and necessary being* and (TC_8) – (TC_{10}) jointly imply (DS). Moreover, for reasons already discussed, (DS) and (TC_1) – (TC_7) jointly imply (NTDT), and (DS), (TI), and (TC_1) – (TC_7) jointly imply (OAST). So (DS), (TI), and (TC_1) – (TC_7) jointly imply (DS^+) . We can now see how Aquinas would answer the question, “even assuming, (TI) and (TC_1) – (TC_7) , why accept both (DS) and (DS^+) , rather than rejecting both”? He would say: we can get from (TC_8) – (TC_{10}) (and the ancillary premiss that there is a God who is a first and necessary being) to (DS), and we can get from (TC_1) – (TC_7) (and the ancillary premiss (TI)) to (DS^+) .⁴

III. EVALUATING THE THOMISTIC CASE FOR (DS^+)

Suppose we asked Aquinas why we should accept (TC_1) – (TC_7) . In the case of (TC_3) and (TC_3) – (TC_7) . I think Aquinas would respond along these lines:

A substantial form — or an essence, or an existence, or a perfection — is as such a proper or improper part of the being that has (or is) that substantial form, or essence, or existence, or perfection. So if a being is not identical to its substantial form — or essence, or existence, or perfection — it follows that that being has that substantial form — or essence, or existence, or perfection — as a part, and is accordingly composite.

In the case of (TC_1) , (TC_2) , and (TC_4) , I think Aquinas would say:

Any being that belongs to a genus, or has differentia or accidental forms also has a substantial form, an essence, and an existence. By the above reasoning, any being that has a substantial form, or an essence, or an existence, is composite. So any being that belongs to a genus, or has differentia or accidental forms is composite.

But can we really say that a being that has a (substantial or accidental) form, or an essence, or an existence, is either identical to or partly composed of that form, or essence, or existence? The idea that we can is not only unobvious, but also on the face of it strange.

Suppose I asked someone, “what’s your favourite thing about this lawnmower?” I could imagine her replying “its colour” or “its shape”. Suppose on the other hand I asked someone, “what’s your favourite part of that lawnmower?” If someone replied, “its colour”, or “its shape”, I would assume that she had misunderstood my question: I would probably say something like: “I didn’t ask what your favourite *feature* of the lawnmower was; I asked what your favourite *part* of the lawnmower was”. If, however, accidental forms were parts of what they accidentally inform, then the shape and colour of a lawnmower would be parts of it, since they are accidental forms of it, and “its colour” or “its shape” should be as acceptable an answer to the question, “what’s your favourite part of the lawnmower?” as it would be to the question, “what’s your favourite thing about the lawnmower?” Again, suppose that for some reason I thought that two people were discussing a part of a lawnmower, and I asked them, “what part of the lawnmower are you discussing?” If they replied, “its existence” or “its essence”, I would assume from their reply that they had misunderstood the question I was asking. Analogously, suppose I thought two zoologists were discussing a part of a horse, and asked them what part of that horse they were discussing. If they answered, “its equinity”, I would assume from their reply that they had misunderstood my question.

Here a defender of Aquinas might respond:

⁴ There is a complication here. I have been assuming that, for Aquinas, we can establish that there is a God who is a first and necessary being before establishing that there is a God who is *omnino simplex*. This is a natural enough assumption, given that (in the *Summa Theologiae*) the *tertia via* precedes the arguments for divine simplicity, and the *tertia via* seems to be presented as an argument for the existence of a God who is a first and necessary being. Still, some commentators have thought that (however things might appear) in the *tertia via*, Aquinas is arguing for the existence of a first and necessary being (one Norman Kretzmann calls “Alpha”), who will only subsequently be shown to be God. If this interpretation is right, then (however things might appear) in *quaestio* 3 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas is actually arguing for the simplicity+ of Alpha, rather than the simplicity+ of God; only subsequently, when it has been shown that Alpha has the right attributes to be God, can we move from the doctrine of the simplicity+ of Alpha to (DS^+) .

This reasoning is captious. In everyday contexts, when people talk about the parts of a lawnmower or a horse, they have in mind its “ordinary parts”. But ordinary parts are not the only kind of parts there are; there are also what we might call “metaphysical parts”. Or perhaps this isn’t the best way of putting it. Perhaps “ordinary parts” and “metaphysical parts” are not different kinds of part (in the way that tigers and lions are different kinds of animal), and are instead parts in different senses of “part” (in the way that chemical solutions and algebraic solutions are *proprie loquendo* solutions in different senses of “solution”, rather than different kinds of solution). Once we see that there are metaphysical parts as well as ordinary parts, we can see that there is nothing counterintuitive about the idea that a being’s (substantial or accidental) form, or essence, or existence, is either a part of that being, or that being itself, so that any being that is distinct from, but has, a form, or an essence, or an existence is composite, in virtue of having what Vallicella calls “metaphysical composition”.

Now it does not seem at all obvious to me that a human being’s humanity, or risibility, or essence, or existence, is any kind of part of that human being, or is a part of that human being in any sense of “part”. Be that as it may, I shall argue that, even assuming that there are “metaphysical” as well as “ordinary” parts, the distinction between ordinary and metaphysical parts is of less help than we might suppose in defending the cogency of Aquinas’ case for (DS⁺).

Suppose that “part” is a generic term that applies univocally to both ordinary parts and to forms, essences, and existences. Then (TC₁)–(TC₇) seem unexceptionable. But equally, it is hard to see why anyone would accept (TC₈)–(TC₁₀), unless she had already bought in on a view almost as strong as (DS⁺). After all, if composition is a generic term covering both “ordinary composition” and “metaphysical composition”, then (TC₈)–(TC₁₀) in effect say that no being that is distinct from, but has, a form, or an essence, or an existence, is a first being or a necessary being. Given that God is by definition a first being, it’s hard to see why anyone would accept that no being that is distinct from but has a form, or an essence, or an existence, is a first being, unless they already accepted that if there is a God, then (DS⁺) is true.

Similarly, suppose that “part” is an ambiguous term that applies non-univocally to ordinary parts on the one hand and to forms, essences, and existences on the other. Then (TC₁)–(TC₇) are ambiguous. If we take (TC₁)–(TC₇) to be claims about which conditions are sufficient for “ordinary composition” (for having parts in the ordinary sense), (TC₁)–(TC₇) seem doubtful. If we take (TC₁)–(TC₇) to be claims about which conditions are sufficient for “metaphysical composition” (for having parts in the metaphysical sense), they seem unexceptionable. But now we can ask whether (TC₈)–(TC₁₀) say that composition in the ordinary sense is sufficient for contingency and unfirstness, or say that composition in the metaphysical sense is sufficient for contingency and unfirstness. If (TC₈)–(TC₁₀) say that composition in the ordinary sense is sufficient for contingency and unfirstness, but (TC₁)–(TC₇) say that composition in the metaphysical sense are necessary for having but not being one’s form, or essence, or existence, then the path from (DS) to (DS⁺) is blocked: there is no way to get from the claim that beings different from their forms, essence or existence are composite in the metaphysical sense, and the claim that beings that are composite in the ordinary sense are not first or necessary, to the claim that if a being is first and necessary, it is not composite in the metaphysical sense. Suppose, on the other hand, (TC₈)–(TC₁₀) say that composition in the metaphysical sense is sufficient for contingency and unfirstness, just as (TC₁)–(TC₇) say that distinction from one’s form, or essence, or existence is sufficient for composition in the metaphysical sense. Then the path from (DS) to (DS⁺) is not blocked; but again, it’s hard to see why someone would accept (TC₈)–(TC₁₀) unless she was already convinced that if there is a God, (DS⁺) is true.

Summing up: Aquinas argues for (DS⁺) on the grounds that composition is both necessary for distinctness from one’s form(s), essence, and existence, and incompatible with “firstness” and necessity. But on the face of it, it is not at all obvious that composition is in fact necessary for distinctness from one’s form(s) or essence, or existence: that is, it is not at all obvious that “partless” as well as “partite” beings couldn’t be distinct from their form(s), essence, and existence. Assuming for the sake of argument that there are “metaphysical” as well as “ordinary” parts, and that forms, essences and existences are metaphysical (proper or improper) parts, it can be argued that it *is* obvious that (metaphysical) composition is necessary for distinctness from one’s form(s), or essence, or existence. But in that case, it seems far from obvious that (metaphysi-

cal) composition is not only necessary for distinctness from one's form(s), or essence, or existence, but also incompatible with firstness or necessity.

Nothing I've said up to now raises questions about the truth or defensibility of (DS⁺), as opposed to questions about the cogency of Aquinas' arguments for it. I shall round off this paper with a brief look at some of the reasons for which I think (DS⁺) is indeed, as Stump says, "difficult".

IV. SOME WORRIES ABOUT (DS⁺)

In what follows, I shall sketch three worries about (DS⁺). (The first concerns the tenability of (DS⁺) as such, and the second two concern the co-tenability of (DS⁺) with other doctrines (divine omniscience, divine choice) that for Aquinas are non-negotiable.) The first (and most central) one turns on the relation between *being F* and *having F-ness*.

If someone is genuinely humble, she has genuine humility. If someone is really wise, she has real wisdom. If something exists necessarily, it has necessary existence. If something is plausible, it has plausibility. These examples and many more suggest that for any *x*, and any *F-ness*, it is true that

- (1) If *x* is *F*, then *x* has *F-ness*.

Also, if a being exists contingently, we can say not just that it has existence contingently, but also that it has *its* existence contingently. If a suggestion is plausible, we can say not just that it has plausibility, but that it has *its* plausibility. If you are proud, we can say, not just that you have pride, but that you have *your* pride. These examples and many more suggest that, for any *x*, and any *F-ness*, it is true that

- (2) if *x* is *F*, then *x* has *x's F-ness* (*x* has the *F-ness* of *x*).

Also, if Christina = Tinuviel, and kindness = Courtney's favourite virtue, then Christina has kindness if and only if Christina has Courtney's favourite virtue if and only if Tinuviel has Courtney's favourite virtue if and only if Tinuviel has kindness. Generalizing, for any *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*:

- (3) If *a = c* and *b = d*, then *a* has *b* if and only if *a* has *d* if and only if *c* has *d* if and only if *c* has *b*.

This principle seems evidently true. If *a = c* and *b = d*, then one and the same thing is both *a* and *c*, and one and the same thing is both *b* and *d*. If the thing that is both *a* and *c* has the thing that is both *b* and *d*, then *a* has *b*, *a* has *d*, *c* has *d*, and *c* has *a* will all be true; if the thing that is both *a* and *c* does not have the thing that is both *b* and *d*, then *a* has *b*, *a* has *d*, *c* has *d*, and *c* has *a* will all be false.

With these preliminaries out of the way, we can now set out the first worry about (DS⁺). Aquinas thinks it can be shown that (i) God is good (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 37), (ii) God is goodness itself (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 38) and (iii) God is His goodness (*Ibid.*). The last claim follows more or less directly from (DS⁺), since (DS⁺) says that God is the same as all His perfections, and His goodness is one of His perfections.

Given that God is good, and (1), we may infer that God has goodness; given that God is good, and (2), we may infer that God has His goodness. Also, given (DS⁺), God = His goodness. So, given (DS⁺), and (3) we may move from

- (i) God has His goodness.

to

- (ii) God's goodness has His goodness

- (iii) God's goodness has God

- (iv) God has God.

and

- (v) God and His goodness have each other (from (i) and (iii)).

The difficulty is that, while (i) is unproblematic, (ii)–(v) all seem (at least) problematic. It might be argued that, even if it is initially unsettling, (ii) is upon reflection not intuitively unacceptable. For, it might be said, if God is good, then so is the goodness He has. (Compare: if God exists, so does the existence He has). And if God's goodness is good, then God's goodness has goodness, and indeed has God's goodness. Be that as it may, from an intuitive point of view, (iii)–(v) all seem defective. One wants to say — at least I want to say: God has His goodness, but not the other way round; God has His goodness, but He doesn't have *Himself* (although, of course, He *is* Himself). Just as God is an immovable mover, He is “an unhaveable haver” — incapable of being had, either by Himself or by anything else — just as much as Socrates is. If, however, (i) is unproblematic, and (iii)–(v) are defective, then the explanation would seem to be that it's true that God has His goodness, but false that God is His goodness — which implies the falsity of (DS⁺).

Naturally, one might resist this argument against (DS⁺) in various ways. For example, one might deny (2) on the grounds that, although God is good, it is not true that He *has* His goodness; it is instead true that He *is* His goodness. Or one might deny (3), and insist that ___ *has* ___ is what Quine would call a referentially opaque context (like ___ *is trivially identical to* ___, or ___ *is known to be identical to* ___). Or one might ‘bite the bullet’, and say that even if (ii)–(v) sound very odd, they are all just as true as (i). For reasons of space, I shall assert without arguments that none of these ways of resisting the argument against (DS⁺) at issue seem satisfactory.⁵ I shall, however, underscore that, to my mind, Aquinas would concede that the argument against (DS⁺) just set out at least initially appears to be cogent.

At *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 13, 1, *ad* 1um Aquinas notes that we use both concrete and abstract terms to signify God — abstract ones (such as “goodness”, or “deity”) to signify His simplicity, and concrete ones to signify His subsistence (that is, His “completeness”). But both kinds of names fail to express God's mode of being. For God is both subsistent and simple; and abstract terms signify something as simple, but not as subsistent, whereas concrete terms signify something as subsistent, but not as simple. In a similar vein, at *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 30, Aquinas says that because “goodness” signifies something as non-subsistent (*bonitas significat ut non subsistens*) and “good” signifies something as concrete (*ut concretum*) neither term signifies God perfectly; hence (as Dionysius says) both terms may be both affirmed and denied of God.

If I understand this passage, Aquinas is suggesting that we naturally conceive of the referents of abstract terms — of “nesses”, as we might call them, as simple, but ontologically “incomplete”, or “non-subsistent”, or “dependent”, or “received”. That is, we naturally think of “nesses” as necessarily being in, or being of, or being had by, something else. As for the referents of concrete terms (such as “Socrates”, or “this man”) we naturally conceive of them as “subsistent” or “independent” or “unreceived” (indeed, “unreceivable”) — as beings that are not, and could not be, in, or of, or had by anything else — but also as composite. Hence God, in His subsistent simplicity, is radically unlike both concrete and abstract beings, as we naturally conceive of them.

Now if, before we do philosophical theology, we naturally conceive of the referents of abstract terms as essentially “received” — as essentially had, and hence essentially haveable beings, and we naturally conceive of the referents of concrete terms as essentially unhad and unhaveable beings, then, before doing philosophical theology, we naturally regard statements such as (i) as true, and statements such as (iv) and (v) as false. We will intuit that God's goodness, inasmuch as it is (a simple) “ness”, is in, or received by, or had by something — to wit, God — whereas God, inasmuch as He is a complete or subsistent being, is not in, or received by, or had by, anything else. In other words, our natural way of conceiving concrete and abstract beings — (pre-philosophically-reflective common sense, if you will — gets the relations between God and His goodness, or God and His existence, or God and His life, badly wrong, in such a way as to make the argument against (DS⁺) under discussion look convincing.

So, if my reading of Aquinas is right, he would concede that the argument against (DS⁺) under discussion gives us good *prima facie* reasons to deny (DS⁺), although it does not give us good *ultima facie*

⁵ Readers who want arguments will find some in my *Aquinas on Being, Goodness, and God* (Routledge, 2015), chapter 4, section 2.

reasons to deny it, in light of the existence of cogent arguments for (DS⁺). If, as I am inclined to believe, there aren't cogent arguments for (DS⁺), it is hard to see why the argument against (DS⁺) under discussion doesn't give us good *ultima facie* as well as good *prima facie* reasons to deny (DS⁺).

My second worry about (DS⁺) turns on the nature of the difference between believing and disbelieving a proposition. *A* could change *B*'s marital status, or net worth (in a given interval of time), even though *B*'s intrinsic properties remained unchanged (throughout that interval of time). Suppose, for example that Sydney Shoemaker's "local freezes" are possible⁶, and suppose that *A* and *B* inhabit a world in which they occur. If *A* is outside a region undergoing a local freeze, and *B* is inside it, *A* could change *B*'s marital status or net worth, even though *B*'s intrinsic profile is (temporarily) "frozen".

But it's hard to see (at least, it's hard for me to see) how *A* could change *B*'s view about whether *p* (in a given interval of time), even though *B*'s intrinsic properties remained unchanged (throughout that interval of time). Suppose *B*'s intrinsic profile does not change throughout a given interval. How could anything *A* does (in that interval) to the world outside *B* suffice to move *A* from believing that *p* to disbelieving that *p*, or vice-versa (in that interval)? The disappearance of *B*'s spouse (in a certain interval) could in and of itself change *B*'s marital status (in that interval), despite the constancy of *B*'s intrinsic properties (throughout that interval), but it's hard for me to see how any changes in *B*'s surroundings (in a certain interval) could, in and of themselves, suffice to move *B* from believing that *p* to disbelieving that *p* (in that interval), despite the constancy of *B*'s intrinsic profile throughout that interval. *A* could change *B*'s marital status or net worth without changing *B* herself (that is, without changing *B*'s intrinsic profile); but how could *A* change *B*'s mind about whether *p* without changing *B* herself (without changing *B*'s intrinsic profile)?

Let us call a change from believing that *p* to disbelieving that *p* or vice-versa a change in the *polarity* in one's view about whether *p*. Assuming (as seems to be true) that *A* could change *B*'s marital status or net worth without changing *B*'s intrinsic profile, but could not change the polarity of *B*'s view about whether *p* without changing *B*'s intrinsic profile, why might this be so?

When *being F* and *being G* are different properties, we may say there is a difference between *being F* and *being G*. Let us say that the difference between *being F* and *being G* is (as such) an intrinsic difference if independently of whether or not *a = b*, (time) *t = (time) t'*, or (possible world) *w = (possible world) w'*, it cannot be that *a* is *F* at *t* in *w*, and *b* is *G* at *t'* in *w'*, unless the (total) intrinsic profile of *a* at *t* in *w* is different from the (total) intrinsic profile of *b* at *t'* in *w'*.

Equivalently: when *being F* and *being G* are different properties, the difference between *being F* and *being G* is (as such) an intrinsic difference if, independently of whether or not *a = b*, (time) *t = (time) t'*, or (possible world) *w = (possible world) w'*, *a*'s *being F* at *t* in *w* and *b*'s *being G* at *t'* in *w'* jointly guarantee that the intrinsic profile of *a* at *t* in *w* is different from the intrinsic profile of *b* at *t'* in *w'*.

Notice that whenever the difference *being F* and *being G* is intrinsic, *F*-ness and *G*-ness are incompatible. For suppose that *F*-ness and *G*-ness are compatible properties. Then it's possible that *a* is *F*, and *b* is *G*, and *a = b*. So it is possible that *a* is *F*, *b* is *G*, and *a* has the same intrinsic profile at *t* in *w* that *b* has at *t* in *w*.

By way of example, the difference between *being round* and *being square* is intrinsic. It cannot be that *a* is currently actually round, and *b* is currently actually square, unless the current intrinsic profile of *a* in the actual world is different from the current intrinsic profile of *b* in the actual world. Nor can it be that *a* is round at time *t* in the actual world, and *b* is square at a different time *t'* in the actual world, unless the intrinsic profile of *a* at *t* in the actual world is different from the intrinsic profile of *a* at *t'* in the actual world. Nor can it be that *a* is round at *t* in the actual world, and *b* is square at *t* in an alternative possible world, unless the intrinsic profile of *a* at *t* in the actual world is different from the intrinsic profile of *b* at *t* in the alternative world.

If *F*-ness and *G*-ness are incompatible properties, and *F*-ness and *G*-ness are both intrinsic, then the difference between *being F* and *being G* will be intrinsic. For suppose that *a* is *F* at *t* in *w* and *b* is *G* at *t'* in *w'*. Given that *F*-ness and *G*-ness are both intrinsic, we know that *F*-ness is included in the intrinsic

6 See Sydney Shoemaker, "Time Without Change", *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 12 (1969).

profile of a at t in w , and G -ness is included in the intrinsic profile of b at t' in w' . Given that F -ness and G -ness are incompatible, we know that G -ness is *not* included in the intrinsic profile of a at t in w . So we know that the intrinsic profile of a at t in w is different from the intrinsic profile of b at t' in w' (the latter but not the former includes G -ness); so we know that the difference between being F and being G is (as such) intrinsic. On the other hand, when F -ness and G -ness are incompatible properties, the difference between being F and being G may be intrinsic, even if neither F -ness nor G -ness are intrinsic properties. For example, the difference between being euphoric and looked up to and being dysphoric and looked down on is intrinsic (anyone who is euphoric and looked up to will have a different intrinsic profile from anyone who is dysphoric and looked down on, since anyone who is euphoric will have a different intrinsic profile from anyone who is dysphoric). But neither *being euphoric and looked up to* nor *being dysphoric and looked down on* are intrinsic properties, since they are both properties one cannot have (whatever one's intrinsic profile), unless one stands in the appropriate relation to individuals in the outside world.

We asked earlier what might explain the (apparent) fact that A can change B 's marital status or net worth without changing B 's intrinsic profile, but A cannot change the polarity of B 's view about whether p without changing B 's intrinsic profile. Here is a straightforward (and, to my mind, plausible) answer: the difference between being single and being married, or having lower net worth and higher net worth, is not an intrinsic difference. Hence A can change B 's marital status or net worth, without changing B 's intrinsic profile. But the difference between believing that p and disbelieving that p is an intrinsic difference; hence A cannot change the polarity of B 's view about whether p without changing B 's intrinsic profile.

If, however, the difference between believing that p and disbelieving that p is intrinsic, then — assuming that God is omniscient in both the actual world, and some alternative possible world — (DS^+) is false. Let “ G ” rigidly designate the actual world, and let “ H ” rigidly designate an alternative world in which God is omniscient. At G , God accepts *G is the actual world* and rejects *H is the actual world*; at H , God accepts *H is the actual world* and rejects *G is the actual world*. So God believes something at G that He disbelieves at H (and vice-versa). On the assumption that the difference between believing that p and disbelieving that p is intrinsic, it follows that God has a different intrinsic profile at G than He has at H . And, for reasons already discussed, (DS^+) can only be true if God has the same intrinsic profile in every world (at every time in every world, if God is (essentially) omnitemporal; timelessly in every world, if God is (essentially) timeless). So (DS^+) is incompatible with God's being omniscient in more than one possible world.

Because the details of this argument may have made it harder to take it in, a recap might be helpful. The core intuition is that constancy in intrinsic profile is incompatible with variation in polarity of view, whether constancy and variation are construed temporally or modally. Perhaps some people will lack this intuition, and see no problem about the idea that temporal variation in extrinsic properties could be sufficient to produce temporal variation in polarity of view, despite temporal constancy in intrinsic profile. Or perhaps some people will concede that there is a problem about the idea that temporal variation in extrinsic properties could be sufficient to produce temporal variation in polarity of view, despite temporal constancy in intrinsic profile, but see no problem about the idea that modal variation in extrinsic properties could be sufficient to produce modal variation polarity of view, despite modal constancy in intrinsic profile. All I can say is that I see a problem in both cases: I don't see how differences in a person's surroundings can make any difference to the polarity of that person's view about whether p , unless they make a difference to that person's intrinsic properties.

My third worry turns on the nature of choice. Suppose I have a choice about how things are outside of me (that is, about how things are in the external world). Then, it seems, I must also have a choice about how things are within me (that is, about my internal states). Suppose, say, I have a choice about whether this salt shaker ends up here, and that pepper shaker ends up there, or vice-versa, inasmuch as I have a choice about whether I put this salt shaker here, and that pepper shaker there, or vice-versa. If I have a choice about where I put the salt and pepper shakers, it seems, that can only be because I have a choice about what internal states I shall be in: I have a choice about whether to be in an internal (presumably cerebral) state

which will (ultimately) result in the salt and pepper shakers being (respectively) here and there, or a different internal (presumably cerebral) state which will (ultimately) result in the salt and pepper shakers being (respectively) there and here. (In various philosophical and science-fictional contexts, a mad scientist leaves a victim no choice at all about which internal states (in particular, which cerebral states) he or she is in. We assume, without even thinking about it, that in such cases the mad scientist has left the victim no choice about whether (e.g.) the mad scientist turns off the brain-controlling device, or for that matter has a cup of tea.)

It seems that the same would hold, even for an immaterial being who could put salt and pepper shakers where she wanted by telekinetic acts of will. Such a being would have a choice about where the salt and pepper shakers ended up, without having a choice about what cerebral or somatic states she was in (*ex hypothesi*, she wouldn't have any), but couldn't have a choice about where the salt and pepper shakers ended up, if she were "locked into" all her internal states. At least, I cannot see how a being — whether immaterial or material — could have a choice about how things go "outside her", if she has no choice about how things go "within" her. I cannot understand how she could have a choice about how things outside her are, if she has no choice about how she herself is.

Now I take it that being in an internal state is having an intrinsic property: if consciousness is an internal state of a being, than *being conscious* is an intrinsic property of that being. So, assuming that a being can have a choice about the external world only if that being has a choice about his or her internal states, a being can have a choice about the external world only if that being has a choice about his or her intrinsic properties.

If, however, a being has a choice about whether he or she has a certain property, then, whether or not that property is intrinsic, it must be possible for that being to (exist and) have that property, and also possible for that being to (exist and) not have that property. (If everything must be self-identical, then nobody has a choice about being self-identical; if nothing is possibly self-distinct, then nobody has a choice about being self-distinct). So, assuming that a being has a choice about whether or not to have a property *P*, either *P* or its complement (that is, the property things have if and only if they lack *P*) will be a strongly contingent property of that being. (If a being that has a choice about having *P* chooses to have *P*, then *P* will end up being a strongly contingent property of that being; if a being that has a choice about having *P* chooses to lack *P*, then *P*'s complement will end up being a strongly contingent property of that being.)

So if a being has a choice about how the external world is, then that being has a choice about its intrinsic properties, and if that being has a choice about its intrinsic properties, it has strongly contingent intrinsic properties. It follows that as long as God has a choice about how the world outside Him is, God has strongly contingent intrinsic properties. And (for familiar reasons), as long as God has strongly contingent intrinsic properties, (DS⁺) is false.

I am unsure that this last worry is as pressing as the second and (especially) the first worry sketched earlier. On the one hand, it seems intuitively right (to me) that if a mad scientist — or the laws of nature together with the actual past — leave us with no choice about our internal states, then they don't leave us a choice about anything else; and if God's decision leaves an angel with no choice about his internal states, His decision leaves that angel with no choice about anything else. If this is so, it seems natural to assume that if God's nature leaves Him with no choice about His internal states, it leaves Him with no choice about anything else, either. That said, the claim that no agent can have a choice about anything, unless that agent has a choice about their internal states may seem less than evident to many (in particular, to those who think of divine causation as agent causation), and I'm not sure how to argue for it. Perhaps something like this would work:

Having a choice about something implies having a choice about whether to direct one's will "towards" or "away from" that thing (willing or "nilling" that thing, as it were). But the difference between willing *x* and nilling *x* is an intrinsic difference: that's why it's impossible to "redirect" someone's will (to move that person from willing to nilling something, or vice-versa), if all one changes is that person's surroundings. So having a choice about anything implies having a choice about how to direct one's will, and having a choice about how to direct one's will implies having a choice about one's internal states (and intrinsic properties.)

If this argument sets out the reasons for accepting that having a choice about anything implies having a choice about one's intrinsic properties, then our third worry is a close cousin of our second: in both cases the crucial idea is that polarity variation (in the first case, accepting/rejecting, in the second, in willing/nilling) is incompatible with intrinsic constancy.⁷

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