

SIMPLICITY AND ASEITY  
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There is a traditional theistic doctrine, known as the doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which God is an absolutely simple being, completely devoid of any metaphysical complexity. On the standard understanding of this doctrine—as epitomized in the work of philosophers such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas—there are no distinctions to be drawn between God and his nature, goodness, power, or wisdom. On the contrary, God is identical with each of these things, along with anything else that can be predicated of him intrinsically.<sup>1</sup>

Although divine simplicity was once regarded as an essential part of philosophical theology, having been upheld for over a millennium by a veritable army of philosophical theologians—not only Christian, but also Jewish and Islamic—the doctrine has, in more recent history, fallen on hard times. Philosophers and theologians now seldom speak of divine simplicity, and when they do, their remarks are almost always critical. Indeed, contemporary analytic theists often take themselves to have conclusive reasons for rejecting it. “The trouble with the idea” C. B. Martin once remarked “is just that it is

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<sup>1</sup> Let us say that an *intrinsic* predication characterizes things “in virtue of the way they themselves are”, whereas an *extrinsic* predication characterizes them “in virtue of their relations or lack of relations to other things” (cf. Lewis 1986, 61). This distinction, though pervasive in philosophy, is notoriously resistant to analysis. In what follows, therefore, I shall have to rely on the intuitive understanding of it. I would only add that it must be kept separate from two other familiar distinctions—namely, (a) that between essential and contingent predication, and (b) that between non-relational and relational predication. Intrinsic predications can be either essential (e.g., “God is wise”) or contingent (e.g., “Socrates is wise”). And, even if most intrinsic predications are non-relational, there are some intrinsic *relational* predications (e.g., “God is identical with himself”, “Socrates chooses to go to the marketplace”, “Socrates has parts”).

hogwash”.<sup>2</sup> Many others would agree, perhaps even be willing to go so far as to claim, with Quentin Smith, that divine simplicity is not only “plainly self-contradictory” but actually “testifies to the predominance of faith over intellectual coherence”.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I take the first steps necessary for restoring the doctrine of divine simplicity to its former glory, arguing that its widespread rejection in contemporary philosophy and theology is certainly premature, perhaps ultimately unwarranted. There can be no question that this doctrine comes with substantial and controversial commitments in metaphysics. But in each case, I shall argue, these commitments are perfectly respectable, having been ably defended and taken very seriously on independent grounds in the contemporary literature. If my argument is successful, it will be clear that this doctrine—together with the conception of divine aseity that traditionally motivates it—deserves more attention than it has yet received at the hands of contemporary philosophers and theologians.

My discussion is divided into three main parts. In Section 1, I provide a brief introduction to divine simplicity, describing its chief motivation historically and explaining why, on the standard contemporary interpretation, the doctrine looks incoherent. In Section 2, I articulate and defend an alternative interpretation of divine simplicity, one calculated to avoid the problems plaguing the standard interpretation and to establish the doctrine’s coherence. In Sections 3, I show how my preferred interpretation can be extended to deal with what is perhaps the chief objection to

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<sup>2</sup> Martin 1976, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Smith 1998, 524, n. 3. The *locus classicus* for contemporary difficulties with simplicity is Plantinga 1980. There are, however, a number of works that have contributed in important ways to the contemporary understanding of these difficulties, including each of the following: Mann 1982, 1983; Morris 1985; and Stump and Kretzmann 1985.

simplicity from within traditional theism itself—namely, the objection that it appears to exclude the possibility of contingent divine volition and knowledge.

## 1. THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

The doctrine of divine simplicity arises from philosophical reflection on a traditional conception of God—one that is common both to philosophers of antiquity and to adherents of the world’s three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In order to clarify this doctrine, as well as to prepare for a discussion of the main objections to it, it will be useful to approach simplicity via the traditional theistic conception from which it arises.

*1.1 Personhood, Aseity, and Simplicity.* Traditional theism has many ingredients, including among others that God is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good (or loving), eternal, necessarily existing, divine being. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive. But it is sufficient to highlight one of the most important assumptions of traditional theism—namely, that God is a *person*, at least in the broad sense of an entity possessing the sorts of mental states generally regarded as constitutive of personhood.<sup>4</sup> For as the foregoing list makes clear, the God of traditional theism possesses intellectual states like knowledge (in virtue of which he is omniscient), and appetitive states like desires or volitions (in virtue of which he is perfectly good or loving).

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<sup>4</sup> In certain contexts, it might be better to speak of the God of traditional theism as an entity possessing the sorts of mental states generally regarded as constitutive of a *personal being* rather than a *person*, so as to leave open the possibility, insisted on by traditional Christian theists, that there is more than one person in God. I shall ignore this complication here, since is not relevant for my purposes, but cf. Michael Rea’s contribution to this volume XXXX.

Traditional theists disagree among themselves about how exactly to think of divine personhood. Some ancient Greeks, for example, claim that God possesses each of his mental states essentially, so that he could not have known or willed anything other than he actually knows or wills. By contrast, other traditional theists, including most orthodox Jews, Christians, and Muslims, insist that God possesses at least some of his mental states contingently, so that he could, for example, have chosen to create a universe different from the actual one—or none at all. Even so, these differences occur within the traditional conception of God as a person in the broad sense sketched above.

There is another ingredient of traditional theism that is especially important for our discussion in what follows. In addition to thinking of God in broadly personal terms, traditional theists also habitually think of him as an absolutely independent being—that is, as a being who is *first* or *primary* in the sense that he does not depend on anything distinct from himself. Such a being, it is often said, exists entirely from himself (*a se*). Hence, traditional theists often characterize God’s absolute independence in terms of his *aseity*.

Here again, there are disagreements to be noted among traditional theists. Some, influenced by the philosophical theology of Aristotle, regard divine aseity as among the most basic or fundamental features of our conception of God. Aquinas’s famous “five ways”, for example, are specifically designed to establish the existence of a being who is primary in just the sense described above—a being, which he says, “everyone calls God”.<sup>5</sup> Others, influenced more by neo-Platonic considerations, take divine goodness or perfection to be God’s most basic feature, arguing that divine aseity follows directly from it. Thus, both Augustine and Anselm defend divine aseity on the grounds that

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<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 1.2.3.

*dependency on another* is always an imperfection, and hence must be excluded from our conception of God. But here again the differences among traditional theists arise from a common commitment—in this case, to the view that divine aseity is somehow essential to God.

The reason that divine aseity is especially important for our purposes here is that it provides divine simplicity's chief motivation historically. As Aquinas points out, in the section of his *Summa Theologiae* immediately following the "five ways", it is a very short step from aseity to simplicity:

Every composite thing is posterior to its components and dependent on them. But, as was shown above, God is the first being [and hence not dependent on anything]. (*Summa Theologiae* 1.3.7)

The basic pattern of reasoning that Aquinas invokes here helps to explain why, on the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity, God must lack not only proper parts or constituents, but even distinct properties or attributes. If God exists entirely *a se*, he cannot depend on anything in any way at all, not even in the way that a subject depends on its properties (in order to exemplify them). As Aquinas says in his other *Summa*:

In every simple thing, its being and *that which it is* are the same. For if the one were not the other, simplicity would be removed. As we have shown, however, God is absolutely simple. Hence, in God, being good is not anything distinct from him; he *is* his goodness. (*Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.38)

This same basic pattern of reasoning pervades traditional philosophical theology, and lies behind not only Aquinas's Aristotelian-based formulation of divine simplicity, but also standard neo-Platonic formulations of the doctrine. Thus, Augustine, inspired by the very same considerations, says in a much-quoted passage in the contemporary literature:

We speak of God in many ways—as great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else does not seem unworthily said of him. Nonetheless, God is identical with his greatness, which is his wisdom (since he is not great by virtue of quantity, but by virtue of power); and he is identical with his goodness, which is his wisdom and his greatness; and he is identical with his truth, which is all of these things. For in him it is not one thing to be blessed and another to be great, or wise, or true, or to be good, or to be altogether himself. (*De Trinitate* 6.7.8)

Following Augustine in this regard, Anselm says in a well-known passage of his

*Proslogion*:

Life, wisdom, and all the rest are not parts of you, but all are one, and each of them is the whole of what you are and the whole of what the others are. (*Proslogion* 18)

And similar such remarks can be found in the works of other traditional theists, not only in the Latin-speaking Christian west, but also in the Arabic-speaking Jewish and Islamic east. In short, it can be found wherever there is support for the traditional understanding of divine aseity.<sup>6</sup>

*1.2 Simplicity and its interpretation.* On the standard contemporary interpretation, the doctrine of divine simplicity requires that God is identical with each of his intrinsic properties. Nor is hard to see why. What else could it mean to say that God is identical with his nature, goodness, power, and so on? The problem with this standard interpretation, however, is that it appears to lead directly to incoherence. If God is identical with each of his properties, then God must himself be a property. But *that* seems absurd. As we have seen, one of the most obvious things about God, on traditional theism, is that he is a person. But no person can be a property. For properties are, by their very nature, *exemplifiable*—that is, things that can be possessed, instantiated, or had. But no person could be a thing of that sort. Indeed, insofar as divine simplicity requires God to be a property it appears to be not merely absurd, but guilty of a category

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jordan 1983 for further discussion and references, especially to Plotinus, who appears to be an important source for thinkers in the east and west.

mistake—that of placing a non-exemplifiable thing (namely, God) into the category of exemplifiable (namely, properties).<sup>7</sup>

If we take a closer look at traditional formulations of divine simplicity, however, we can see that there is nothing in them that requires the identification of God with a *property*. On the contrary, all they require is that if a predication such as “God is good” is true, then there exists an entity, *God’s goodness*, that is identical with God; likewise, if “God is powerful” is true, then *God’s power* exists and is identical with God; and so on for all other such divine predications. More precisely, what traditional formulations of the doctrine require is the following:

(DS): If an intrinsic predication of the form “God is *F*” is true, then *God’s F-ness* exists and is identical with God.

So understood, the doctrine of divine simplicity takes no stand whatsoever on the precise nature of the entities with which it identifies God. It does assume that there are (or at least could be) entities corresponding to expressions such as ‘God’s goodness’, ‘God’s power’, and ‘God’s wisdom’.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, it says nothing about the specific ontological category to which they belong. But this just goes to show that the claim that God is identical with a property results not from the doctrine of divine simplicity itself, but rather from its conjunction with something like the following “property account” of predication and abstract reference:

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<sup>7</sup> Again, cf. Plantinga 1980 for the *locus classicus* for this sort of objection.

<sup>8</sup> Thus, traditional formulations of the doctrine are inconsistent with certain forms of nominalism—namely, all those which deny that expressions of the form ‘*a*’s *F*-ness’ can function as genuinely referring devices.

(PA): If an intrinsic predication of the form “*a* is *F*” is true, then *a*’s *F-ness* exists, where this entity is to be understood as a property.<sup>9</sup>

Although contemporary defenders of divine simplicity often recognize that something like PA is at the root of contemporary difficulties with the doctrine, they are extremely reluctant to abandon it. Indeed, they prefer (almost to a person) to defend the coherence of the standard interpretation (i.e., the conjunction of DS and PA) rather than develop an account of predication and abstract reference in terms of something other than properties.<sup>10</sup> This seems to me to be a mistake—indeed, one that explains the general failure of contemporary defenses of divine simplicity. Even so, there are at least two things which explain the contemporary resistance to abandoning PA.

First, this account strikes many as extremely intuitive. We habitually speak *as if* for any true (atomic) predication, there is a subject of predication (e.g., Socrates), there is property (e.g., Socrates’ wisdom or wisdom in general), and the subject exemplifies the property (e.g., Socrates *is* wise). In fact, this account is so intuitive that many find it difficult to imagine how expressions of the form ‘*a*’s *F-ness*’ could refer to anything but properties.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Since proponents of divine simplicity typically speak of God being identical with *his* goodness, *his* power, and *his* wisdom (rather than with goodness, power, wisdom *tout court*), I have stated the property account in such a way that it introduces properties using expressions of the form ‘*a*’s *F-ness*’ (rather than of the form ‘*F-ness*’). Those philosophers who think of properties as particular (i.e., the so-called trope theorists) will, of course, have no difficulty with this, but those who think of properties as universals may find it puzzling. It should be noted, however, that strictly speaking PA is neutral as regards the specific nature of the properties. If Socrates and Plato are both human, then according to PA they must each have a property of humanity. Even so, PA takes no stand on the question of whether Socrates’ humanity is identical with Plato’s (and hence whether properties are particular or universal).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g., Leftow 1999; Mann 1982 and 1983; Rogers 1996; Stump and Kretzmann 1985; Vallicella 1992.

<sup>11</sup> It is sometimes suggested that these expressions could refer to states of affairs—that is, to the exemplification of the properties by their subjects (cf. Plantinga 1980). But this suggestion is of little use, from the point of view of divine simplicity, since identifying God with a state of affairs seems just as absurd as identifying him with a property. For further discussion, cf. Brower Forthcoming.



Second, many traditional proponents of divine simplicity say things that appear to commit them to PA. To take just one example, consider the following passage from Anselm's *Monologion*, which involves a comparison of divine and human justice

A human being cannot *be* his justice, though he can *have* his justice. For the same reason, a just human being is not understood as *being* his justice (*existens iustitia*), but as *having* his justice. By contrast, it is not properly said that the supreme nature *has* its justice, but *is* its justice. Hence when the supreme nature is called just, it is properly understood as *being* its justice, rather than as *having* its justice.<sup>12</sup> (*Monologion* 16)

Here Anselm suggests that, if we want to explain the justice of a human being, we must appeal to a property exemplified by that human being. Thus, if Socrates is just, this is because he has his justice. Like other traditional proponents of simplicity, therefore, Anselm seems to take for granted that at least some creaturely predications of the form '*a* is *F*' entail the existence of properties, which can in turn be referred to by expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness'. But if expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness' refer to properties in the case of creatures, we might expect them to behave similarly in the case of God. To the extent that traditional proponents of divine simplicity suppose that at least some creaturely predications imply the existence of properties, therefore, it is natural to suppose they do so because they accept the property account at PA.

There are, then, some considerations that make it tempting to accept the standard interpretation of divine simplicity in terms of PA. Even so, I maintain, we must not give in to this temptation. For the claim that God is identical with a property really is absurd, and hence any interpretation of simplicity that requires its truth must be rejected as incoherent. I realize, of course, that there are some who want to resist this conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The possessive pronouns do not explicitly occur in the Latin, but I think they are best understood as implicit here (as they often are in Latin)—especially in light of Anselm's insistence that God's goodness, power, wisdom, and so on must be conceived of as distinct from our own. For discussion of Anselm's theory of properties, in the case of both God and human beings, see Brower 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. again the references cited in **n. 10**.

But since I have defended the conclusion at length elsewhere, I will not repeat my arguments for it here.<sup>14</sup> Instead, I will simply present my own preferred alternative to the standard interpretation, and then argue that it not only renders the doctrine of divine simplicity perfectly coherent, but also fits with the view that there is contingent divine volition and knowledge.

## 2. SIMPLICITY AND COHERENCE

The standard interpretation of divine simplicity assumes that expressions such as ‘God’s nature’, ‘God’s goodness’, and ‘God’s power’ refer to properties. If we are to reject the standard interpretation, then we must find an alternative interpretation according to which these expressions refer to entities of some other type. But what other type of entities can they plausibly be taken to refer to? The answer, I suggest, is *truthmakers*.<sup>15</sup>

*2.1 Truthmakers, predication, and ontological neutrality.* ‘Truthmaker’ is something of a term of art in contemporary philosophy, but the idea behind it is perfectly intuitive. Many of the predications we make about the world are true. That much seems obvious. But many of us also think it is obvious that when such predications are true, their truth must be a function of the way the world is. That is to say, when a predication of the form ‘*a* is *F*’ is true, there must be something that *makes* it true—or better, some thing (or some plurality of things) which *explains* its truth or *in virtue of* which it is true. As these

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Brower Forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> This answer is apparently one whose time has come. Cf., e.g., Bergmann and Brower 2006, Pruss Forthcoming, and Oppy 2003. For a defense of the claim that truthmakers are not only sufficient, but also necessary for making sense of divine simplicity, cf. Brower Forthcoming.

qualifications indicate, the notion of “making” at work here is not causal, but explanatory.<sup>16</sup>

How exactly we are to understand the notion of explanation involved in truthmaking? Most contemporary philosophers take it to be a form of broadly logical necessitation or entailment, so that if an entity  $E$  is a truthmaker for a predication  $P$ , then  $E$  necessitates that  $P$ .<sup>17</sup> Although truthmaking and entailment are closely allied notions, we must be careful not to identify them, since that would lead to obvious absurdities, including the claim that truths expressed by necessary predications—such as ‘2 is an even number’—have anything whatsoever for their truthmaker. But, then, if truthmaking is not to be identified with entailment, how exactly are we to understand it? This is a notoriously difficult question to answer. My own view is that the truthmaking is a primitive or *sui generis* form of necessitation, one that does not admit of (non-circular) analysis or definition.<sup>18</sup> But other answers to the question have been given in the literature.<sup>19</sup> Fortunately, we needn’t insist on the correctness of any of the answers here. For our purposes, it will suffice to note that truthmaking must involve *some form of* broadly logical necessitation, so that even if  $E$ ’s necessitating that  $P$  does not, by itself, *guarantee* that  $E$  is  $P$ ’s truthmaker, it does make  $E$  a candidate—perhaps even a *prima facie* good candidate—for playing this role.

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<sup>16</sup> It would, perhaps, be better to speak of *truth-explainers* rather than *truth-makers*, but the terminology of truthmaking has become so well entrenched that to do so would require a departure from standard usage.

<sup>17</sup> Assuming, of course, that  $P$  exists. For simplicity’s sake, I shall hereafter ignore this complication and speak of truthmakers as entities that *actually* make predications true rather than as entities that *would* make such predications true, if they existed. In doing so, I don’t mean to beg any questions about the ultimate nature of truth-bearers or to assume that truthmakers require the existence of corresponding truths.

<sup>18</sup> Here I follow Rodriguez-Pereyra (2002, 34), who argues that the best we can do is to say that an entity  $E$  is a truthmaker for a predication  $P$  if and only if  $E$  is an entity *in virtue of which*  $P$  is true, and then illustrate what we mean by ‘being true in virtue of’ with examples.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Restall 1996 suggests that we can define truthmaking in terms of the notion of non-classical or “relevant” entailment, and Smith 1999 and 2002 claims that we can define it in terms of *representation* or *projection*, which is the dual of necessitation.

Whatever else we say about the notion of a truthmaker, it should be clear that it is intended to be an ontologically neutral notion. To characterize an entity as a truthmaker, as we've just seen, is to characterize it in terms of a certain metaphysical function or role it plays—that of necessitating (in a certain way) the truth of the predications it makes true. But such a “functional” characterization places no restriction on the nature or ontological category to which a truthmaker can belong. Indeed, it leaves open the possibility that truthmakers can belong to ontological categories of very different kinds, including both *concrete individuals* (such as persons) and *properties*.

Consider, for example, an essential predication such as “Socrates is human”. In this particular case, it is possible to identify its truthmaker with the subject of the predication itself. For the existence of the concrete individual, Socrates, by itself sufficient for the truth of “Socrates is human”, and hence a candidate for its truthmaker. Generalizing on this sort of case, some philosophers have been led to think that concrete individuals are the truthmakers for all of their true essential predications—that is, for each predication whose truth they entail.<sup>20</sup> But that seems too strong. Entailment, as we've seen, is necessary but not sufficient for truthmaking. Even so, it is plausible to think that a concrete individual can be the truthmaker for a proper subset of its true essential predications—namely, each of its true *intrinsic* essential predications. Thus, Socrates himself, just in virtue of being the concrete individual he is, is plausibly regarded as the truthmaker for “Socrates is human”, “Socrates is an animal”, “Socrates is a material object”, “Socrates exists”, “Socrates is identical with himself”, and so on.

What if we turn now to contingent predications, such as “Socrates is wise” or “Socrates is just”? Here things get more complicated. The mere existence of Socrates, it

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<sup>20</sup> E.g., Bigelow 1988: 128.

would seem, is not sufficient for the truth of these predications; hence he cannot himself be their truthmaker. But then what are we to say about their truthmakers? There is more than one way to answer this question, but the two most common way of answering it both appeal to properties. First of all, we can say, as David Armstrong does, that the truthmaker for contingent predications are facts (or concrete states of affairs) that include properties as constituents.<sup>21</sup> In that case, the truthmaker for “Socrates is just” will be the *fact that Socrates is just*, which includes the property *justice* as a constituent.

Alternatively, we can say, as C. B. Martin does, that the truthmaker for contingent predications are non-transferable tropes (or concrete individual properties essentially dependent on the subjects of which they are the properties).<sup>22</sup> In that case, the truthmaker for “Socrates is just” will not be the *fact that Socrates is just*, but *Socrates’s justice*—an entity such that, in all possible worlds in which it exists, Socrates exists and is just.

*2.2 Truthmakers and divine simplicity.* The relevance of all this for divine simplicity is perhaps already obvious. As we have seen, this doctrine requires us to identify God with each of the things that can be intrinsically predicated of him:

(DS): If an intrinsic predication of the form “God is *F*” is true, then *God’s F-ness* exists and is identical with God.

As we have also seen, however, the doctrine takes no stand on the precise nature of the entities with which it identifies God. Thus, if we are to understand what the doctrine amounts to, we must adopt an interpretation that takes such a stand (but does so without

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<sup>21</sup> See Armstrong 1997 and 1989.

<sup>22</sup> See Armstrong 1989, esp. 116-119. For a more complete development and defense of this view, see Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1989.

also rendering the doctrine incoherent). Suppose, therefore, we adopt the following

“truthmaker account” of predication, modeled after the property account given earlier:

(TA): If an intrinsic predication of the form “*a* is *F*” is true, then *a*’s *F-ness* exists, where this entity is to be understood as the truthmaker for “*a* is *F*”.

Interpreted in light of TA, the doctrine of divine simplicity entails that God is identical with the truthmaker of each of the true intrinsic predications that can be made about him. Thus, if God is divine, he is identical with that which makes him divine; if he is good, he is identical with that which makes him good; and so on in every other such case. On this interpretation, therefore, divine simplicity just amounts to the claim that God is the truthmaker for each of his true intrinsic predications.<sup>23</sup>

It should be clear already that the truthmaker interpretation goes considerable distance toward rendering the doctrine of divine simplicity coherent. On this interpretation, for example, the doctrine does not require that God is identical with each of his properties, and hence is himself a property. Nor is there anything obviously absurd about what this interpretation does require—namely, that God is the truthmaker for each of his true intrinsic predications. Indeed, on the assumption that each of God’s intrinsic predications is also essential, this view actually seems quite plausible in certain respects (more on this below).

Finally, note that the truthmaker interpretation allows us to make sense of the claim, endorsed by traditional proponents of simplicity, that abstract expressions like ‘*a*’s

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<sup>23</sup> Following Pruss Forthcoming, we can put this point more precisely by saying that, on the truthmaker interpretation, God is the *minimal* truthmaker for each of his true intrinsic predications—where an entity *E* is a minimal truthmaker for a predication *P* just in case *E* is such that no proper part of it also makes *P* true. As Pruss points out, this qualification is needed since on some theories of truthmaking, if *E* is a truthmaker for *P*, then so is anything of which *E* is a part. Once the qualification is added, however, the absolute simplicity of God follows immediately. For if God had any proper parts, there would be true intrinsic divine predications (namely, about these parts) whose minimal truthmakers would not be God (but the parts).

justice' can refer both to concrete individual persons (in the case of God) as well as to properties or exemplifiabes (in the case of creatures). For according to TA, expressions of this form will refer to whatever it is that makes predications like “*a* is just” true. But in the case of creatures, unlike that of God, such predications will often be plausibly regarded as contingent. In order to supply a truthmaker for it, therefore, we must appeal to something like particular properties (or non-transferable tropes). And this, I think, is exactly what traditional proponents of simplicity such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas do.<sup>24</sup>

For all these reasons, it should be clear that the truthmaker interpretation provides us with an account of divine simplicity that is at least *prima facie* coherent. Of course, even if this interpretation avoids the standard difficulty with the doctrine, there might still be concerns about its own coherence or plausibility. In order to complete my defense, therefore, I need to respond to the objections most likely to threaten TA itself. In decreasing order of strength, these would seem to be the following: (1) truths do not have truthmakers; (2) truthmakers can't serve as referents for expressions of the form ‘*a*'s *F*-ness’; (3) a single thing cannot be the truthmaker for many distinct truths; and (4) a simple God cannot be the truthmaker for all his true intrinsic predications.<sup>25</sup>

*Objection 1:* In the course of developing my preferred interpretation of divine simplicity, I have appealed to the thesis that truths have truthmakers—that is, to the claim that when a given predication is true, there is some entity (or some plurality of entities) in the world that explains its truth. Although initially intuitive, this appeal might seem

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Fox 1987 for defense of the claim that medieval philosophers operate within some form of truthmaker account of predication. Cf. Klima 2004 for a defense of the claim that they also typically adopt some form of trope theory of properties.

<sup>25</sup> For discussion of some of the other objections facing TA, including worries about the relationship between divine and human “attributes” on TA, see Brower Forthcoming.

problematic, since it runs into difficulty when applied to predications such as “Homer is blind” and “Unicorns are not real”, whose logical structure seems to be of the form “*a* is not *F*” and “there are no *F*s”. Indeed, predications of this sort are often thought to be the undoing of truthmaker theory, since the only candidate truthmakers for them appear to be negative facts like *a*'s *not being F* and *there not being any F*s, and yet negative facts strike many as extremely implausible. As David Lewis says:

It seems, offhand, that [such predications] are true not because things of some kind *do* exist, but rather because counterexamples *don't* exist. (Lewis 1999, 204)

It is important to emphasize, however, that my interpretation of simplicity does not require the general thesis that *all truths have truthmakers*. On the contrary, it requires only a restricted version of it—namely, the thesis that *all positive (atomic) predications of the form 'a is F' have truthmakers* (cf. TA above). This more restricted thesis, however, is extremely plausible. It appears, for example, to be what motivates the traditional problem of universals, which is plausibly regarded as that of specifying the truthmakers for positive atomic predications of the form ‘*a* is *F*’.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, we have already seen this illustrated in the case of the “property account” of predication (at PA above), in terms of which divine simplicity is standardly interpreted. The property account takes for granted that whenever a predication of the form ‘*a* is *F*’ is true, there is a subject, there is a property, and the subject exemplifies the property. But this just appears to be a specification of the restricted truthmaker thesis, a way of saying that the truthmakers for positive (atomic) predications share a common structure or ontology.

But perhaps it will be worried that once we abandon the general truthmaker thesis, we lose all motivation for holding the restricted version of it. “If any truths can lack

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000 and 2002, chap. 1.



truthmakers,” it might be said, “then surely some positive atomic truths can, however initially plausible it seemed to deny this.” But if that’s right, then my interpretation will be committed to the general truthmaker thesis after all.

It is not clear to me how serious this worry is. A number of philosophers have argued that a principled account can be given of why certain truths (including negative existentials) lack truthmakers, even though all positive atomic truths require them.<sup>27</sup> But even if their argument fails, and no such principled account can be given, it isn’t obvious what follows for my interpretation. For other philosophers have argued equally strenuously for the general truthmaker thesis, insisting in particular that we are perfectly within our rights allowing truthmakers even for negative existentials.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, these issues are too large to be resolved here. Let us simply grant, therefore, that it’s a cost of my interpretation that it requires the success of truthmaker theory *in some form or other*. In the present context, this seems to me a perfectly acceptable cost. In fact, I would regard it as a major advance for the doctrine of divine simplicity if contemporary philosophers came to regard its plausibility as on a par with truthmaker theory.

*Objection 2:* Although truthmaker theory has received considerable attention from contemporary philosophers, it is not typically developed in connection with any particular view of abstract reference in mind. On my interpretation, however, truthmakers are required not only to explain the truth of true predications of the form ‘*a* is *F*’, but also to serve as the referents for their abstract counterparts—that is, expressions of the form ‘*a*’s *F*-ness’. This might seem problematic. For it is natural to assume that such

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. e.g., Bigelow 1998, 128-134 and Lewis 2001 for an account in terms of the supervenience of truth on being.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. e.g. Armstrong 1997 and Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005.

abstract expressions can only refer to properties.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, I suspect it's the naturalness of this assumption that has always made the property interpretation so tempting.

As far as I can tell, however, there is nothing to prevent us from rejecting this assumption, despite its naturalness, and simply stipulating, as my interpretation does, that expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness' are technical terms whose referents are the truthmakers for the corresponding predications (in this case, '*a* is *F*'). Of course, it might be objected that this stipulation is arbitrary. But such an objection would seem to have little force. A truthmaker theorist will, presumably, need some way of referring to truthmakers for particular predications, one that doesn't beg any ontological questions, and TA gives us just what is needed. To refer to the truthmaker for '*a* is *F*', qua truthmaker, it tells us, simply construct the corresponding sentential nominalization, '*a*'s *F*-ness'.

Again, it might be objected that in adopting such a stipulation we are departing from common sense, or at least the common practice of a large number of philosophers. As we've seen, many traditional philosophers have reserved expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness' for properties, and hence for things that can be exemplified. And the same could be said of many contemporary philosophers. But even granting this, it's not clear that the objection has much force. As we have seen, the stipulation in question allows—indeed, is designed to allow—that expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness' still refer to properties in many cases (e.g., *Socrates's justice*). Indeed, insofar as philosophers have traditionally taken these sorts of cases as paradigmatic, it should come as no surprise that they would think all such expressions refer to properties. In any case, we shouldn't balk at some

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<sup>29</sup> Again, once we've ruled out the possibility of their referring to states of affairs. Cf. n. 11 above.

regimentation of ordinary (philosophical) language, especially in the service of a large-scale metaphysical view such as truthmaker theory.<sup>30</sup>

*Objection 3:* But even if we allow that all predications of the form ‘*a* is *F*’ have truthmakers, and that such truthmakers can be referred to by expressions of the form ‘*a*’s *F*-ness’, there might still appear to be something problematic about my interpretation of simplicity. For if this interpretation is true, then God himself turns out to be the truthmaker for a large number of conceptually distinct predications—including “God is divine”, “God is good”, “God is powerful”, and “God is wise”. But can a single thing really be the truthmaker for many conceptually distinct truths?

This objection would have some force if truthmakers were intended to provide the conceptual content or meaning of predications. But they are not. Indeed, it is part-and-parcel of contemporary truthmaker theory to deny that truthmakers stand in a one-to-one correspondence with the predications they make true. And such a denial is plausible in particular cases. Consider, for example, the following predications:

- (S1) Socrates is human.
- (S2) Socrates is an animal.
- (S3) Socrates is a material object.
- (S4) Socrates exists.
- (S5) Socrates is identical with himself.

As noted earlier, it seems perfectly plausible to suppose that Socrates himself is the truthmaker for each of these, despite the fact that they differ in meaning and logical form.

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<sup>30</sup> It may be wondered how, on the truthmaker interpretation, expressions like ‘*a*’s *F*-ness’ are related to more general expressions of the form ‘*F*-ness’, which have also often been taken to refer to properties (or better, universals). The most natural answer, it seems to me, is to say that whereas expressions like ‘*a*’s *F*-ness’ refer to truthmakers for specific predications—namely, predications of the form ‘*a* is *F*’—expressions like ‘*F*-ness’ refer to truthmakers for some predication or other of the form ‘*x* if *F*’. In that case, the truthmaker interpretation will allow us to say not only that God is identical with his goodness (i.e., the truthmaker for ‘God is good’), but also that he is identical with goodness—or better, *a* goodness (i.e., a truthmaker for some statement of the form ‘*x* is good’).

But if that is right, then there can be no objection in principle to saying that God is the truthmaker for many distinct predications.

*Objection 4:* But even if a single thing can, in principle, be the truthmaker for many distinct predications, it might be said that my interpretation stretches credulity insofar as it requires not only this, but also that a single *absolutely simple thing* can make true not *the specific variety* of predications that are supposed to be true of God *on* traditional theism. Let us consider what can be said in response to this objection.

To begin, let us note that there doesn't appear to be anything particularly objectionable about saying that even a simple being can be the truthmaker for a number of distinct predications. Suppose there exists a particular property or trope of Socrates—say, Socrates's whiteness. Now consider the following set of predications, modeled on those stated above (at S1-S5), which can be made about it:

- (T1) Socrates's whiteness is a whiteness trope.
- (T2) Socrates's whiteness is a color trope.
- (T3) Socrates's whiteness is a trope.
- (T4) Socrates's whiteness exists.
- (T5) Socrates's whiteness is identical with itself.

Here, as above, it seems plausible to say that a single thing—namely, Socrates's whiteness—is the truthmaker for all these predications, despite the fact that Socrates's whiteness is a trope, which is standardly regarded to be a simple being. If there is something objectionable about the truthmaker interpretation, therefore, it must have something to do with the specific variety of predications it requires a simple being to make true.

Initially, there does appear to be something worrisome about the specific variety of predications for which the God of traditional theism is supposed to be the truthmaker. In order to see why, compare the two sets of predications we've considered so far (at S1-

S5 and T1-T5). In each case, we have three predications which subsume their subject under increasingly general sortals (namely, ‘human’, ‘animal’, and ‘material object’ in S1-S3, and ‘whiteness trope’, ‘color trope’, and ‘trope’ in T1-T3), and two predications whose truth appears follow from purely formal features of reality (namely, S4-S5 and T4-T5, since everything is such that it both exists and is identical with itself). Given the relationship between the members of these two sets, it seems plausible to say that anything which makes true the first member (S1 or T1) will thereby make true the others (S2-S5 or T2-T5).

Now contrast these two sets of predication, where it is plausible to suppose we have a single truthmaker, with the following sorts of predication, which are supposed to be true of God on traditional theism:

- (G1) God is divine.
- (G2) God is good.
- (G3) God is powerful.
- (G4) God is wise.
- (G5) God is just.

Unlike the members of the other two sets of predications we’ve considered, G1-G5 do not appear to involve sortals related as general to specific; nor do any of them appear to be true solely in virtue of purely formal features of reality. We could, of course, always *add* further predications to this effect, but that wouldn’t help with an explanation of how God can be the truthmaker for each of the predications already listed.

A little reflection, however, reveals that G1-G5 are more closely connected than they might initially seem. Traditional theists standardly derive the intrinsic divine attributes (or better, the truth of predications involving them) from their understanding of

the divine nature. That is to say, they take God to be not only good, powerful, wise, and just, but to be all these things *in virtue of* being divine.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, there is a real question whether the list of divine attributes we arrive at following either of these two procedures will include all the things traditional theists have wanted to say about God. For our purposes, however, that is neither here nor there. Provided we insist—as traditional theists have, and as certainly seems *coherent* to do—that all of God’s (non-formal) intrinsic attributes derive from the divine nature, then it will follow that predications like those at G1-G5 are related in roughly the way that predications subsuming their subject under increasingly general sortals are related. That is to say, they will be related in such a way that anything making the first predication true will also make the others true as well.

In the end, therefore, there would appear to be nothing absurd or incoherent about asserting any of the following claims: (1) the truths expressed by positive atomic predications have truthmakers; (2) that such truthmakers can be referred to by the corresponding abstract terms; (3) that a single thing is the truthmakers for many distinct truths; and (4) a simple God is the truthmaker for all his true intrinsic predications, provided that the truth of these predications either follows from purely formal features of reality (as in the case of “God exists” or “God is identical with himself”) or can be explained in terms of the truthmaker of the predication “God is divine”. And since the

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<sup>31</sup> As I mentioned earlier, traditional theists differ among themselves about how exactly the divine nature is to be conceived. Some, such as Anselm, conceive of the divine nature in terms of absolute perfection, as that than which nothing greater can be conceived. For such theists, the predication at G1 will be shorthand for the claim that God is an absolutely perfect being, and the predications at G2-G5, as well as any other intrinsic divine predications, will involve specification of particular perfections. Others, such as Aquinas, conceive of the divine nature in terms of aseity. For theists of this sort, the predication at G1 will be shorthand for something like the claim that God is an absolutely independent being, and the derivation of particular divine attributes will be more indirect (e.g., Aquinas himself derives complete actuality from independence, and derives the other attributes from this, arguing that a being who is completely actual will have all perfections, without limit, and hence be all good, powerful, wise, and just).

coherence of these claims is all that's required to secure the coherence of the truthmaker interpretation of divine simplicity, I conclude that this interpretation provides us with all we need to resolve the chief contemporary difficulty with the doctrine.

### 3. SIMPLICITY AND CONTINGENCY

Apart from questions about its coherence, the main contemporary objection to divine simplicity has focused on its apparent exclusion of contingent divine volition and knowledge.<sup>32</sup> As indicated earlier, most traditional Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe that God possesses certain of his mental states contingently—more specifically, that he could have chosen to create a universe different from the actual one (or none at all), and hence could have known different things than he actually knows. But this seems incompatible with divine simplicity. For in order to will or know something different, it would seem that God himself would have to be different. But divine simplicity requires that he be the same across all possible worlds.

It is important to see that this problem is not one that the truthmaker interpretation can, by itself, resolve. If God possesses certain of acts of will or knowledge contingently, then it would seem to follow that there are true divine predications that are both intrinsic and contingent, such as:

- (G6) God freely chooses to create the universe.
- (G7) God knows that *p*, where *p* is a contingent truth.

Insofar as these predications are intrinsic, my interpretation requires God himself to be their truthmaker. But insofar as these same predications are contingent, it would also

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<sup>32</sup> Not only has this objection been discussed at a number of places in the contemporary literature (cf. e.g. Craig 2001, O'Connor 1999, Pruss Forthcoming, Stump and Kretzmann 1985, and Stump 2003), but it was also taken seriously by traditional proponents of simplicity (cf., e.g., Aquinas's discussion in *Summa Theologiae* 1.19.3).

seem that God cannot be their truthmaker. For as already indicated, truthmaking is a form of broadly logical necessitation. Hence, if an entity  $E$  is a truthmaker for a predication  $P$ , then  $E$  must necessitate that  $P$ .

Let us call this ‘the problem of contingency’. In this section, I respond to the problem by denying that predications such as G6 and G7 must be regarded as genuinely intrinsic. As will become clear, once this has been denied the truthmaker interpretation fits well with the assumption that God is capable of contingent volition and knowledge.

*3.1 Contingent Divine Volition.* To begin, let us focus on predications like G6, which involve the ascription of contingent divine volitions. It is natural to think of such volitions as intrinsic features of God, especially if we are thinking of them on the model of contingent human volitions. But this is not the only way to think of them. In order to see why, let us approach the matter somewhat indirectly—via a comparison of two different accounts of human volition.

Suppose some agent  $A$  freely chooses on some occasion to perform a specific action, even though  $A$  could just as easily have chosen to do something else. We might describe this situation by saying that, in the actual world,  $w_1$ ,  $A$  has volition  $V_1$ , even though in another possible world,  $w_2$ ,  $A$  has volition  $V_2$ —where  $V_1$  and  $V_2$ , let us grant, are distinct intrinsic states of  $A$ . Now, if we think about such volitions on a libertarian—or more specifically, an agent-causal—model according to which volitions are the irreducible products of free agents, it will turn out that  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  share the same causal history and laws of nature, and yet differ because in  $w_1$   $A$  directly causes  $V_1$ , whereas in  $w_2$   $A$  directly causes  $V_2$  (see fig. 1).



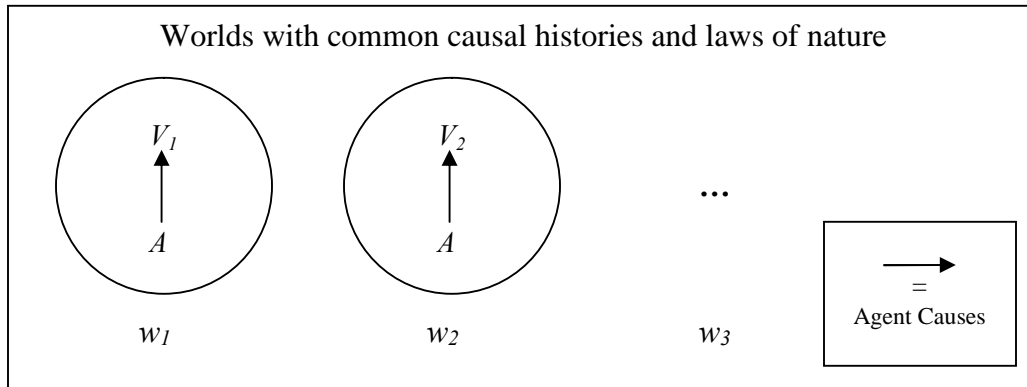


Fig. 1: Agent-causal model of volition

No doubt this understanding of the difference between  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ , like the agent-causal model of volition it presupposes, is controversial. But we can, I think, safely presuppose its coherence here. For once again, it would be a major advance for the doctrine if critics were forced to admit that its plausibility is on a par with that of agent causation.

How is all this relevant to the contingency problem? Note first of all that on the agent-causal model, there are no intrinsic differences in virtue of which  $A$  causes its volitions. That is to say, if we want to distinguish worlds  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ , we have no choice but to appeal to the immediate effects of  $A$ 's agent-causal activity in these worlds—namely, volitions  $V_1$  and  $V_2$ . Now up to this point I've been assuming that  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  are intrinsic features of  $A$ —that is, properties or states possessed by but distinct from  $A$ . Given this, the model is obviously inapplicable to a *simple* God. Nonetheless, it is easy enough to modify the model so as to make it applicable: simply “kick away” the distinct volitions and think of our agent as directly causing the effects themselves.<sup>33</sup> Initially, such a kicking away might seem implausible. Since our volitions are not ordinarily sufficient to produce their immediate effects, we have no choice but distinguish the direct

<sup>33</sup> According to McCann 2005 (esp. 144-145), something like this model is required to make sense of God's creating anything at all.

objects of our agent-causal activity (the volitions) from the effects that indirectly (and perhaps only partially) come about via them. But let us suppose—as seems plausible at least in the case of certain agents, such as God—that the connection between the objects of our agent-causal activity and their effects is non-contingent. In that case, it will be possible to “kick away” the volitions and thus to revise our original account of the difference between worlds  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  as follows: in  $w_1$   $A$  directly causes  $E_1$ , whereas in  $w_2$   $A$  directly causes  $E_2$ , where  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are what we might earlier have described as the immediate effects of  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  (see fig. 2).

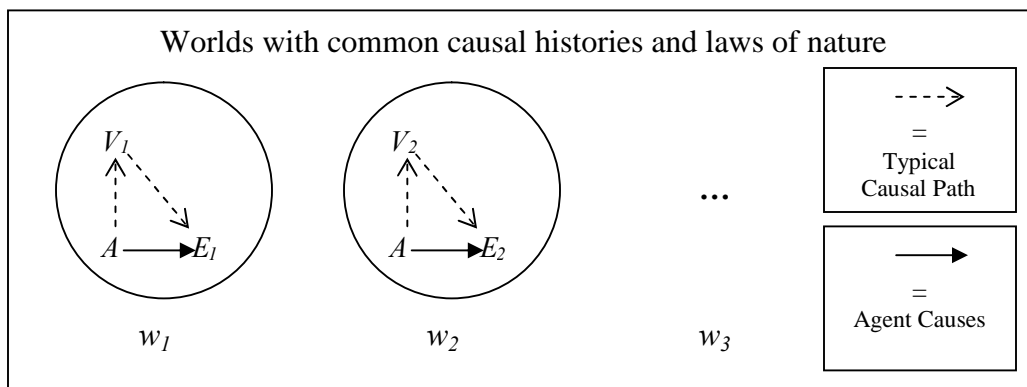


Fig. 2: Revised agent-causal model of volition

On this revised agent-causal model, there are no distinct volitions (or for that matter, any distinct intrinsic features whatsoever) in virtue of which  $A$  causes its effects. Even so, it would be a mistake to deny that  $A$  freely brings about its effects on this model—especially if we add, as often seems plausible, that  $A$  has some reasons that partly explain (in the only way that reasons can explain actions on an agent-causal theory) the specific effects it brings about.<sup>34</sup> Rather than deny that  $A$  has any volitions or choices on this model,

<sup>34</sup> I'm assuming that in God's case his reasons for creating remain the same across all possible worlds, and hence that the only thing that varies is the particular set of reasons he acts on.

therefore, we can instead simply identify *A*'s volitions or choices with *A*'s direct acts of agent causing.<sup>35</sup>

By now it should be clear that the revised agent-causal model provides a straightforward way of handling contingent divine volition, one that violates neither the spirit nor the letter of divine simplicity as I've interpreted it. Consider again our representative example of a predication involving contingent divine volition:

(G6) God freely chooses to create the universe.

On the revised agent-causal model, this predication turns out to be straightforwardly extrinsic. To say that God freely chooses to create the universe is just to say that he stands in a certain relation to something wholly distinct from himself—namely, the relation of *agent causation*. But as we have seen, this is a relation in which an agent can stand to different things in different worlds, despite any lack of intrinsic differences across those worlds.<sup>36</sup> In any case, once G6 is taken to be extrinsic, there is no pressure to interpret God alone as its truthmaker. Indeed, as far as my interpretation of simplicity is concerned, there is no pressure to say it has any truthmaker at all (since my interpretation requires truthmakers only for positive atomic predications of the form '*a* is *F*'). Even so, there is a truthmaker ready to hand, if one is wanted—namely, God, the universe, and the relation of agent causation. Nor is there any danger of this truthmaker's violating divine aseity, since both the universe and God's relation to it contingently depend for their existence (or obtaining) on God rather than the other way around.

Assuming, therefore, as seems plausible, that other predications involving contingent

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<sup>35</sup> For a theory of reasons explanation that fits with agent-causation in general, see O'Connor 1995; and for an attempt to modify this theory to fit with something like the revised agent-causal model, see O'Connor 1999. Cf. also Pruss Forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup> This is perhaps the idea behind the traditional description of the difference between worlds in which God creates different creatures (or none at all) as a difference in the effect.

divine volition can be handled similarly to G6, we appear to have a perfectly general solution to the problem of contingency for divine volitions.

*3.2 Contingent Divine Knowledge.* But we are not quite out of the woods yet. For as we have seen, the problem of contingency arises for ascriptions of contingent divine knowledge as well as volition. Initially, the problem here might seem no more worrisome than in the case of divine volition. Just as we can treat predications involving contingent divine volition as extrinsic, so too it might seem that we can do the same in the case of contingent divine knowledge. Consider a specific instance of the type mentioned at G7 above:

(G7a) God knows that *human beings exist*.

The truth of a predication like G7a would seem to require only two things: (i) that God stand in a certain cognitive relation to the contingent truth that human beings exist; and (ii) that human beings do in fact exist. But if that's right, then predications like G7a will be extrinsic after all. And assuming our treatment of this sort of predication generalizes, we would appear to have a general solution to the problem of contingency for divine knowledge as well as for divine volition.<sup>37</sup>

But note that there is a question that arises here that does not arise for our treatment of divine volition—one that has to do with the consistency of this account with divine aseity. For whether or not predications like G7a are extrinsic, they appear to make God dependent on something distinct from himself—namely, the objects of his

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, assuming (as I shall throughout) that divine beliefs can be explained along the same lines as divine knowledge, we would appear to have a solution to the problem of contingency for them as well. For a different account of divine beliefs, one which treats them differently from divine knowledge and requires a fairly radical form of externalism about content, see Pruss Forthcoming.

contingent knowledge. After all, if God knows that human beings exist, he seems to know this *because* they exist.

Now, in the case of certain predications, including G7a itself, the appearance of dependency can perhaps be avoided by noting that the objects of God's contingent knowledge depend for their existence on God himself. For example, since human beings exist (at least in the first place) only because God has freely chosen to create a universe containing them, we can perhaps say that, strictly speaking, what God depends on for his knowledge that human beings exist is not anything distinct from himself (namely, human beings themselves), but only his own free acts of will or choice.

This strategy will not obviously work, however, for all predications involving contingent divine knowledge. Suppose that instead of G7a, we consider the following predication:

(G7b) God knows that *Smith is freely choosing to mow his lawn*.

It is considerably more difficult to treat this predication in the way we treated G7a above. For unlike the existence of human beings in general, it's hard to see how Smith's free choice to mow his lawn could depend solely on the divine will—unless, of course, we are prepared to accept some form of compatibilism about human freedom. If we are, then we can treat G7b in the same way we treated G7a. For in that case, we can adopt a compatibilist model of human volition—that is, one according to which free choices are not the irreducible products of agents, but the causal consequences of deterministic processes. Then we can say that Smith's free choice to mow his lawn depends on God in roughly the same way that the existence of human beings in general does—namely, by depending on God's choice to create a certain kind of universe (in this case, one having a certain causal history and laws of nature). And likewise for all the free choice of all

human agents. Of course, it might seem odd to adopt a compatibilist account of human volition, but not of divine volition. But perhaps not (or perhaps the compatibilist will want to extend the account to divine volitions as well). In any case, once we adopt a compatibilist account of human volition, the problem vanishes.

But what if we are not prepared to accept any form of compatibilism? In that case, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the truth of G7b violates divine aseity. For in that case, we certainly won't be able to say that Smith's choice depends entirely on God's will—since it is a contradiction to say that God causes an agent to freely choose (in the incompatibilist or libertarian sense) to perform some action. But what else, besides Smith's free choice itself, could God's knowledge in G7b be said to depend on? The only obvious suggestion here is that made by the so-called Molinists (i.e., the followers of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish Jesuit, Louis de Molina): God's knowledge here depends not only on his will (or more specifically, on his choice to create a universe with Smith in his current circumstances), but also on his knowledge of what Smith would freely do in any circumstances in which he is created and left free. Rather than solve our problem with G7b, however, it merely pushes it back a step. For now we have a new predication involving contingent divine knowledge that needs explaining:

(G7c) God knows that *Smith would freely choose to mow his lawn, if created and placed in his current circumstances.*

And here we seem to run up against a predication whose truth really does violate divine aseity. For what Smith would freely do, if created and placed in various circumstances, is generally taken by Molinists to be a brute contingent truth about Smith (or better, about Smith's individual essence, which is an abstract object existing independently of God).

Evidently, therefore, the truth of G7c, and hence the truth of G7b, ultimately requires God to be dependent on something distinct from himself.<sup>38</sup>

What all of this shows is that a full solution to the problem of contingency—that is, one that not only takes care of worries about contingent divine volition and knowledge, but also is fully consistent with the chief motivation for divine simplicity historically—carries a significant cost. It requires the truth of compatibilism (about human, though not divine freedom). Is this cost prohibitive? No doubt, many will think it is, seeing in it sufficient grounds if not for rejecting divine simplicity wholesale, then at least for detaching it from its traditional moorings in divine aseity. But we mustn't be too hasty here. Such an attitude would be justified if compatibilism were obviously incoherent, absurd, or false. But it isn't. Compatibilism has a rich history of supporters, both within and outside of traditional philosophical theology. Indeed, the former often see compatibilism as a natural consequence of theological doctrines just as well established as that of creation (most notably, providence, foreknowledge, predestination, and election). If we are going to evaluate divine simplicity, therefore, especially in the context of its original motivation, then we must engage in the kind of complicated cost-benefit analysis that we have come to expect for the evaluation of any large-scale metaphysical theory. In such an analysis, compatibilism will certainly be one, but it will not be—or at least, shouldn't be—the only deciding factor.

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<sup>38</sup> One could try to avoid this problem by adopting a form of what is known as 'theistic activism'—that is, the view that all abstracta (including individual essences) are mental states of God. In that case, what Smith would freely do, if created and placed in various circumstances, would be a brute contingent truth about God (or God's mental states). Although this might seem to help from the point of view of divine aseity (though cf. Bergmann and Brower 2006 for reservations even about this), it would be of no use for preserving divine simplicity. For such brute truths would appear to involve true predications of God (or God's ideas) that are not only contingent but also intrinsic. As we have seen, however, these are precisely the sorts of predications about God that divine simplicity excludes.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

My aim in this chapter has been to show that the doctrine of divine simplicity deserves further consideration than it has yet received from contemporary philosophers and theologians. If I have achieved my aim, it will be clear that the standard objections to this doctrine can all be answered: the doctrine is neither incoherent, nor incompatible with contingent divine volition and knowledge. Of course, this by itself does not give us reason to accept the doctrine as true. But it does, I hope, go considerable distance toward showing its acceptability. Moreover, insofar as negative attitudes toward simplicity have contributed to the neglect of the considerations motivating it historically, I hope that my defense will also encourage their reevaluation. Contemporary philosophers and theologians often reject traditional views about divine aseity precisely because they lead to the doctrine of divine simplicity. But this is a mistake. Indeed, quite apart from simplicity, such views deserve our attention insofar as they lie at the very heart of the traditional theism, which is still widely taken for granted, both by those who follow Anselm in thinking of God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” and by those who follow Aquinas in thinking of him as “that which explains all motion, change, and contingency”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> [Acknowledgements]



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