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# ABSOLUTE SIMPLICITY

Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzmann

The doctrine of God's absolute simplicity denies the possibility of real distinctions in God. It is, e.g., impossible that God have any kind of parts or any intrinsic accidental properties, or that there be real distinctions among God's essential properties or between any of them and God himself. After showing that some of the counter-intuitive implications of the doctrine can readily be made sense of, the authors identify the apparent incompatibility of God's simplicity and God's free choice as a special difficulty and associate it with two others: the apparent incompatibilities between essential omnipotence and essential goodness, and between perfect goodness and moral goodness. Since all three of these difficulties are associated with a certain understanding of the nature of God's will, the authors base their resolution of them on an account of will in general and of God's will in particular, drawing on Aquinas's theory of will.

Taking creation as their paradigm of divine free choice, the authors develop a solution of the principal incompatibility based on three claims: (i) God's acts of choice are both free and conditionally necessitated; (ii) the difference between absolutely and conditionally necessitated acts of will is not a real distinction in God; and (iii) the conditional necessity of God's acts of will is compatible with contingency in the objects of those acts. The heart of their solution consists in their attempt to make sense of and support those claims. The authors extend their solution to cover the two associated apparent incompatibilities as well.

The article concludes with observations on the importance of the doctrine of God's absolute simplicity for resolving problems in religious morality and in the cosmological argument.

## *1. The doctrine of divine simplicity and some of its difficulties*

The doctrine that God is absolutely simple derives from the metaphysical considerations that have led philosophers and theologians to maintain that God is a being whose existence is self-explanatory, an absolutely perfect being, or pure actuality.<sup>1</sup> We are not concerned here with the foundations of the doctrine, however; for our present purposes we take the doctrine as a datum,<sup>2</sup> referring the reader to its classical derivation in Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, for instance.<sup>3</sup>

Because the doctrine is notoriously difficult, and because our treatment of it will emphasize its difficulties, it is worth noting at the outset that simplicity also



offers advantages for constructive rational theology. For instance, it provides a way out of a dilemma for religious morality and a way of strengthening the cosmological argument, as we will try to show in the last section of our paper.

Despite its metaphysical credentials, its long-established position at the center of orthodox Christianity's doctrine of God, and its advantages for rational theology, the doctrine of simplicity is not used much in contemporary philosophy of religion, primarily because it seems outrageously counter-intuitive, or even incoherent. In attributing a radical unity to God, and to God alone, it rules out the possibility of there being in God any of the real distinctions on the basis of which we make sense of our cognition of other real things. The doctrine's general denial of distinctions can be sorted out into several specific claims, three of which will be enough for our purposes.

The first two are claims of a sort that might also be made about numbers, for instance; only the third is peculiar to divine simplicity. (1) It is impossible that God have any spatial or temporal parts that could be distinguished from one another as here rather than there or as now rather than then, and so God cannot be a physical entity. Next, the standard distinction between an entity's essential and accidental intrinsic properties cannot apply to God: (2) It is impossible that God have any intrinsic accidental properties.

Before going on to the third claim, it may be useful to say a little about the familiar distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, between real properties and Cambridge properties, on which we rely in claim (2). We do not know of a satisfactory criterion for precisely distinguishing intrinsic or real properties from extrinsic or Cambridge properties, but the distinction is widely recognized and sometimes easy to draw. For present purposes it is perhaps enough to say that a change in  $x$ 's extrinsic properties can occur without a change in  $x$ , while a change in  $x$ 's intrinsic properties is as such a change in  $x$ .<sup>4</sup> Ronald Reagan's belief that he is of Irish descent is one of his intrinsic accidental properties; his being mentioned in this article is an extrinsic accidental property of his. The intrinsic properties of numbers are all essential; numbers, like God, cannot have intrinsic accidental properties. But no entity, not even a mathematical or a divine entity, can be exempted from having extrinsic accidental properties.

The third of our claims illustrating the denial of distinctions in the doctrine of simplicity stems from the fact that the doctrine rules out the possibility of components of any kind in the divine nature. So even when it has been recognized that all God's intrinsic properties must be essential, it must be acknowledged as well that (3) It is impossible that there be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God; whatever can be intrinsically attributed to God must in reality be identical with the unity that is his essence. Furthermore, for all things other than God, there is a difference between what they are and that they are, between their essence and their existence; but on the doctrine of

simplicity the essence which is God is not different from his existence. Unlike all other entities, God is his own being.

In these claims the counter-intuitive character of absolute simplicity emerges more flagrantly, as we can show by examining particular problems stemming from one or another of those denials of distinctions.<sup>5</sup> The problems that are going to concern us are raised primarily by claims (2) and (3). From those claims it seems to follow, for instance, that God's knowledge is identical with God's power and also with anything that can be considered an intrinsic property of his, such as one of God's actions—his talking to Cain, for instance. Moreover, God's talking to Cain must, it seems, be identical with talking to Abraham and, for that matter, with any other divine action, such as God's plaguing Pharaoh's Egypt with a hailstorm. And it is not only the drawing of distinctions among God's attributes or actions that is apparently misleading. God's talking to Cain is evidently not really an action of God's, as your talking is an action of yours, but rather part of God's essence. Even that formulation is apparently too broad: God's talking to Cain is not part of his essence; it is his essence, and God himself is identical with it.

These unreasonable apparent implications of the doctrine of simplicity lead to further embarrassments for the doctrine. If God's talking to Cain is essential to God, it is necessary and thus not something God could refrain from doing. Moreover, since God's talking to Cain begins at some instant,  $t_1$ , it is apparently God's-talking-to-Cain-beginning-at- $t_1$  that is essential and therefore necessary, so that it is not open to God even to initiate the conversation a split second earlier or later. So if in accordance with the doctrine of simplicity each action of God's is in all its detail identical with the divine essence, the doctrine entails that God could not do anything other or otherwise than he actually does. Indeed, given the doctrine of simplicity, it is not clear that God can talk to Cain at all, even under the severe restrictions just considered. Every temporal action, unless it is coextensive with all of time, begins and/or ends. If it is true that God talks to Cain, then at  $t_1$  God is talking to Cain and sometime after  $t_1$  God is not talking to Cain. But in that case it seems that God has an intrinsic property at one time which he lacks at another time, and no such distinction is possible under the doctrine of simplicity.

## *2. Resolving some of the difficulties*

Many, but not all, of these counter-intuitive appearances can be dispelled by clarifying the view of God's nature that gives rise to the doctrine of simplicity and by developing the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties. In virtue of being absolutely perfect God has no unactualized potentialities but is entirely actual, or in act. No temporal entity could satisfy that description,<sup>6</sup> and

so no temporal entity could be a perfect being. Nevertheless, the atemporal pure actuality that is God can have various manifestations and effects in time.<sup>7</sup> It is in that way that there is a mistake in thinking of God's talking to Cain as one of the things God does in the strict sense in which a temporal agent's action is an intrinsic property of the agent. Rather, the one thing that is God and is atemporally actual has a variety of effects in time: a conversation with Cain at  $t_1$ , a conversation with Abraham at  $t_2$ , and the production of a hailstorm in Egypt at  $t_3$ . Of course God's talking to Cain is not the same as God's talking to Abraham, but that undoubted distinction does not compromise God's absolute simplicity because those events are to be understood as various temporal effects of the single eternal act identical with God, God's action in the strict sense. Everyone recognizes analogous characterizations of ordinary human actions: the man who flips the switch on the wall may be correctly described as doing just that one thing or he may, equally correctly, be said to do many things in doing that one thing (turning on the light, waking the dog, frightening the prowler, etc.)—a case of one action with many correct descriptions or many consequences, of one action in the strict sense and many actions in a broader sense. But in this ordinary case there are many really distinct facts about that one action—that it results in the turning on of the light, that it results in the waking of the dog, etc. If the conversation with Cain and the hailstorm in Egypt are analogous to these, won't there be many really distinct facts about God's one action and thus, in that special case, about God himself? Yes, but not in a way that compromises simplicity. As a standard characterization of the single divine action we can use Aquinas's formulation: "God wills himself and other things in one act of will" (SCG I 76). As Aquinas understands it, God's willing himself and other things consists in God's willing at once, in one action, both goodness and the manifestation of goodness,<sup>8</sup> and there is no special difficulty in understanding goodness to be manifested differently to different persons on different occasions (even in the form of different speeches or meteorological displays appropriate to different circumstances) in ways that must be counted among the extrinsic accidental properties of the goodness manifested.

The absence of real distinctions among divine attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience is to be explained along similar lines. According to the doctrine of simplicity, what human beings call God's omnipotence or God's omniscience is the single eternal action considered under descriptions they find variously illuminating, or recognized by them under different kinds of effects or manifestations of it. What the doctrine requires one to understand about all the designations for the divine attributes is that they are all identical in reference but different in sense, referring in various ways to the one actual entity which is God himself or designating various manifestations of it. 'Perfect power' and 'perfect knowledge' are precise analogues for 'the morning star' and 'the evening star': non-

synonymous expressions designating quite distinct manifestations of one and the same thing. There are as much truth and as much potential misinformation in ‘Perfect power is identical with perfect knowledge’ as there are in ‘The morning star is identical with the evening star’. And ‘Perfect power is identical with perfect knowledge’ does not entail that power is identical with knowledge any more than the fact that the summit of a mountain’s east slope is identical with the summit of its west slope entails the identity of the slopes.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the problems we have so far raised about absolute simplicity are resolved or at least alleviated on the basis of these considerations. The respect in which God is utterly devoid of real distinctions does not, after all, preclude our conceptually distinguishing God’s actions in the world from one another or from God himself. And insofar as an eternal being can eternally produce various temporal effects, variously timed, nothing in the doctrine of simplicity rules out God’s intervention in time.<sup>10</sup> But these difficulties for absolute simplicity strike us as the easy ones; the hardest one to resolve is the apparent incompatibility of God’s simplicity and God’s free choice. For all we have said so far, the doctrine of simplicity still seems to entail that the only things God can do are the things he does in fact.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. *The apparent incompatibility of simplicity and free choice*

Since no one whose will is bound to just one set of acts of will makes real choices, it looks as if accepting God’s absolute simplicity as a datum leads to the conclusion that God lacks freedom of choice. If we begin from the other direction, by taking it for granted that God does make choices—another central tenet of Christian theology—it seems God cannot be absolutely simple. For the doctrine of divine free choice can be construed as the claim that some of God’s properties are properties he chooses to have—such as his being the person who talks to Cain at  $t_1$ . But it makes no sense to suppose that God freely chooses all his properties, so that it is up to him, for example, whether or not the principle of non-contradiction applies to him, or whether he is omnipotent, good, eternal, or simple. Considerations of this sort evidently require us to draw a distinction between two groups of God’s properties: those that are freely chosen and those regarding which he has no choice. And this distinction, it seems, must be intrinsic to God. It cannot be explained as only a reflection of diversity in the temporal effects brought about by the single eternal activity which is God, or as no more than different manifestations of a single active goodness. Instead, this distinction appears to express a radical diversity within divine agency itself, in that some truths about God—such as that he exists—are not subject to his control, while others—presumably such as that he talks to Cain at  $t_1$ —are consequences of his free choice.<sup>12</sup> Nor can this distinction be explained away as an instance of referring

to one and the same thing under different descriptions in ways suited to human minds, which can acquire only fragmentary conceptions of the absolute unity that is God. As we have already indicated, we think there is no inconsistency in the claim that an absolutely simple entity is correctly described as omnipotent regarded in one way and as omniscient regarded in another way. But recourse to the human point of view appears to be unavailable as a basis for explaining the apparent distinction between necessary and non-necessary divine properties. Moves in that direction would either present the necessary properties as really indeterminate or deny free choice to God, by suggesting that the appearance of free choice in God is really only a consequence of certain extrinsic accidental properties of his or by presenting the apparently freely chosen properties as not really objects of God's choice.<sup>13</sup> So our earlier defense of absolute simplicity against imputations of inconsistency cannot reconcile divine simplicity with divine freedom of choice.

#### *4. Two related apparent incompatibilities*

The apparent incompatibility of freedom of choice and simplicity in God strikes us as closely connected with two others. Because our proposed resolution of the first incompatibility has some bearing on the other two, we will present them briefly before developing our resolution.

In the first place, there seems to be an inconsistency in the concept of a being that is supposed to be both essentially omnipotent and essentially perfectly good.<sup>14</sup> An acceptable definition of omnipotence is notoriously hard to formulate,<sup>15</sup> but any serious candidate has at its core the idea that an omnipotent person can do anything logically possible. An essentially perfectly good person, however, cannot perform any evil action, or is essentially impeccable. Since evil actions are among the logical possibilities, there are many things an essentially perfectly good person cannot do which, on the face of it, an omnipotent person must be able to do. And so it seems that no person can be essentially both omnipotent and perfectly good (as God is said to be).

The second of these two associated apparent incompatibilities lies within the notion of essential perfect goodness itself. Some important accounts of perfect goodness have emphasized desirability, which surely is to be acknowledged as the passive, esthetic aspect of goodness; but any acceptable notion of perfect goodness must also include its active, moral aspect.<sup>16</sup> The notion of a morally good (or evil) person seems to entail that person's capacity to do both good and evil, however, and on that classic understanding of moral agency the idea of a person who is essentially morally good is inconsistent. The classic understanding might be sketched in this way: A person P in a world  $w_1$  is morally good in deciding to perform action x at time t only if there is some possible world  $w_2$

like  $w_1$  in all respects up to  $t$ , but at  $t$  in  $w_2$   $P$  does not decide to perform action  $x$  but decides instead to do something evil. But a person who is essentially perfectly good is by definition a person who does only good in every possible world inhabited by that person. So it seems that one requirement for moral goodness (and hence for perfect goodness) is incompatible with one requirement for perfect goodness; and so no person can be essentially perfectly good (as God is said to be).

In our view these two problems are associated with our main problem regarding simplicity and choice because in all three of them the appearance of incompatibility between characteristics of a perfect being depends on a certain understanding of the nature of God's will. If God's will regarding his actions in time is thought to be free to choose evil, it seems God can be neither absolutely simple nor essentially good. On the other hand, if in an attempt to preserve simplicity and essential perfect goodness God is conceived of as incapable of choosing evil, it seems he can be neither omnipotent nor morally good.

Our three apparent incompatibilities are generated by adding to perfect-being theology the familiar assumption that a free will is essentially an independent, neutral capacity for choosing among alternatives. Our attempt to dispel these appearances of incompatibility depends on replacing the assumption with a theory we take to be both helpful and plausible: Aquinas's account of the will as a natural inclination toward goodness associated with the agent's understanding of goodness.<sup>17</sup>

### 5. Will

Although Aquinas is convinced that freedom of choice is a characteristic of human wills as well as of God's will, his general account of the nature of will presents it as fundamentally neither independent nor neutral:

In their own way, all things are inclined by an *appetitus*<sup>18</sup> toward what is good, but variously.... Some things...are inclined toward what is good along with an awareness of the nature of the good—a condition that is a distinguishing characteristic of an intellect—and these are the things most fully inclined toward what is good. Indeed, they are, so to speak, directed to the good not merely by something else (as are things that lack cognition), or directed only to some good in particular (as are things that have only sense cognition); instead, they are as if inclined toward goodness itself considered universally. And that inclination is called *will*.<sup>19</sup>

General and specific links between will and goodness are built into this definition. Will is understood by Aquinas not as an equiposed capacity, but rather as falling

under the genus of natural inclinations toward what is good. And what distinguishes will from other species of that genus (such as the instincts to seek food and shelter) is will's essential association with intellect rather than merely with sensation (*appetitus rationalis vs. appetitus sensitivus*). In associating will with intellect (as the appetitive and cognitive faculties of the rational soul) Aquinas means to claim, among other things, that will, naturally inclined toward goodness itself considered universally, inclines the agent toward subsidiary ends which the intellect presents to the will as good. Will understood as naturally inclined toward goodness and as relying to a considerable extent on intellect is obviously neither neutral nor independent, and such an account of its nature is bound to raise questions about its freedom and its capacity for genuine choice. But, as can be seen in the quoted passage, Aquinas also understands will to be self-directed and to be presented with more than one particular good; moreover, he expressly argues elsewhere that human beings do have free choice (*liberum arbitrium*).<sup>20</sup> His conviction that all these features can be consistently and plausibly ascribed to will is founded on an analysis of necessity that is incorporated into his theory of will.

In general, on Aquinas's view what is necessary is what cannot not be; the species of necessity are sorted out on the basis of the four Aristotelian causal principles. Two of those principles—matter and form—are intrinsic to what is necessitated, and necessity of the sort associated with them is exemplified, Thomas says,

with respect to an intrinsic *material* principle when we say that it is necessary that everything with contrary components be perishable, or with respect to an intrinsic *formal* principle when we say that it is necessary that a triangle have three angles equal to two right angles. (ST Ia q. 82, a. 1)

Necessity of both these sorts Aquinas calls "absolute" (or "natural"). The two *extrinsic* causal principles, on the other hand, are associated with two distinct sorts of necessity. The "necessity of the *end*, sometimes called utility" is exemplified when something is recognized as necessary in that

someone cannot attain, or cannot readily attain, some end without it—as food is necessary for life, and a horse for a journey. (ibid.)

Finally, the necessity associated with *efficient* causation, "the necessity of coercion," occurs

whenever someone is compelled by some agent so that he cannot do the contrary [of what he is compelled to do]. (ibid.)

On this basis the obvious questions raised by the directedness and dependency

of the will as understood by Aquinas can be answered. Isn't a will that is naturally directed toward goodness naturally necessitated and hence unfree? The will's being directed toward goodness, the ultimate end for all things, is naturally necessitated; but that natural necessity, far from threatening freedom, is a precondition of the will's making choices. Aquinas, following Aristotle, takes the will's activity of choice to depend on its inclination toward the ultimate end as the intellect's activity of reasoning depends on its grasp of the first principles.<sup>21</sup> Choice, as distinct from whim or chance, is motivated, and some motives are subsidiary to others, happiness being the supreme motive or highest good for human beings. So the ultimate end, recognized as a precondition of choice, lies outside the scope of choice, the objects of which are means or subsidiary ends leading more or less directly to that necessitated end or, more broadly, things willed for the end.

Still, doesn't the end necessitate the means? Necessity of the end in its weak, horse-for-journey variety obviously poses no threat to freedom of choice: you can walk rather than ride. Thomas takes it to be no more threatening in its strong, food-for-life variety, presumably because even when an end such as the continuation of one's life cannot be attained without a specific means such as food, one can choose to reject the end—a presumption that is even more plausible in his other example of this variety: "from the volition to cross the sea comes the necessity in the will of wanting a ship" (ST Ia q. 82, a. 1). In the strongest and most clearly relevant variety of necessity of the end, the ultimate end, happiness, is itself absolutely necessary and hence impossible to reject; but the necessity of the end appropriate to human happiness is the weak variety, allowing for choices among more or less (or equally) efficacious means to the unrejectable end.

Even if this summary account of will's involvement with necessity of the sorts associated with matter, form, and end is given the benefit of the doubts it is likely to raise, it answers only questions raised by the natural directedness of will. But what about will's dependence on intellect? Can't that be construed as involving necessity of the sort associated with efficient causation, the one sort of necessitation Thomas admits is incompatible with freedom of will?

The plainest, most familiar evidence that the intellect, in presenting to the will what it conceives of as good, does not cause the will to will anything is that the intellect sometimes presents what it takes to be equally good alternatives, offering no supplementary considerations on which the will might base its choice among the alternatives. A more theory-laden but no less effective sort of evidence is available in a closer look at Aquinas's conception of the relationship between intellect and will. When the intellect presents what it takes to be good, without alternatives, the intellect does indeed move the will, but only as an end moves an agent, "because what is conceived of as good is an object of the will and moves it as an end" (ST Ia q. 82, a. 4). The only necessity emanating from the

intellect, then, is the necessity of the end, and we have already seen that such necessity does not preclude choice: the will can refrain from acting, rejecting a subsidiary end presented to it by the intellect. Even more important is the fact that the will also moves the intellect, and that this moving is carried out “in the way an agent moves something” (ibid.), the will compelling the intellect to attend to some things and to ignore others. So if there is efficient causation anywhere in the relationship between intellect and will, it occurs only in the will’s occasional coercion of the intellect—a consideration that enhances rather than threatens the will’s freedom. What the intellect comes to consider good is thus to some extent under the influence of the will, an influence that is especially powerful because almost everything that is an option for the will can be considered under different descriptions and can consequently be presented as good or as bad depending on which features of it are being attended to and which are being ignored.

So the self-directedness or freedom of the will considered as its partial independence from the intellect is manifested in three capacities: (1) to choose among alternatives presented as equally good, (2) to refrain from pursuing a subsidiary end presented as good, and (3) to direct the intellect’s attention.

Against the background of this much of Aquinas’s theory of will we can sketch an account of moral goodness and evil sufficient for our purposes here. The will, a self-directed rational wanting of the good, can turn to evil in either of two ways. First, for various reasons ranging from ignorance to the complex interaction of will and intellect we have just summarized, the intellect can mistakenly present a bad thing as good or a good thing as better than it is. In the second place, the will of any temporal, imperfect entity is capable of leaving some of its potentialities unactualized, and so it is possible for a human will to do nothing even when presented with a genuine good. It follows that nothing in this theory of will or its accompanying explanation of morality requires will to have a capacity to choose evil over good. Evil does get chosen, of course, but only because it has been presented as good in some respect. And so the possibility of moral evil in the will stems from a defect in the agent whose will it is: it must be either that the agent’s intellect is mistaken in its evaluation of the options or that the agent’s will remains in a condition of potentiality when it should be actualized. It is for that reason that there is no possibility of moral evil in the will of an absolutely perfect being, whose intellect is incapable of error and whose will is eternally actual.

### 6. *God’s will*

The divine will would not count as will at all if it were not like the human will in being essentially an inclination toward goodness as presented by intellect,

but it differs from the human will in being characterized by only the first of the three capacities we picked out as manifesting the self-directedness of will—the capacity to choose among alternatives presented as equally good—in ways we will be considering. As for the second of those capacities, however, since an absolutely perfect being cannot have unactualized potentialities, God's will is entirely actual, or in act, and so has no capacity to refrain from willing anything presented by God's intellect as good without alternatives. And as for the third of those capacities, since God's intellect is likewise entirely actualized, it could not attend to one thing rather than another even if God's will could be imagined, *per impossibile*, as willing that his intellect be directed in such a way.

That difference between the ways in which the divine will and the human will manifest self-directedness reflects the perfection of the former and the imperfection of the latter. For instance, the necessary impeccability of God's will, considered in Section 4 above, is to be understood in terms of these considerations. God's will cannot manifest self-directedness by refraining from choosing between alternatives or from willing what is presented to it as good without alternatives, because it is entirely in act; and so it cannot bring about moral evil by failing to will when it should. And since God's intellect cannot be ignorant of anything, because it is eternally omniscient, it cannot present a mistaken assessment of goodness. It is for those two reasons that neither of the ways in which a will comes to be responsible for evil can characterize the will of God.

But it is not only in lacking two of the modes in which imperfect wills manifest self-directedness that the divine will differs from the human. God's will is also correctly described as self-directed in a way that cannot characterize human wills. Every human will is so constituted as to have happiness as its specific natural end, regardless of its intellect's level of understanding of that goal. God's will, on the other hand, has its natural end, the universal ultimate end, simply in virtue of his perfect understanding of the nature of goodness. Since God is omniscient, he knows himself perfectly; and, in accord with the doctrine of simplicity, he is identical with his goodness, which is perfect goodness itself. Therefore, what God's intellect infallibly discerns as perfect goodness is God himself. And so God's will, which necessarily wills what God's intellect understands to be absolutely good and presents as such to the will, necessarily wills the divine nature: "God necessarily wills his own goodness, and he cannot will the contrary" (SCG I 80).

Although God's willing perfect goodness is necessary, as is a human being's willing happiness, the differences between the divine and human wills in this respect are more significant than that similarity. The essential inclination of the human will toward happiness is part of the constitution of human beings, which they are caused to have, regarding which they are as unfree as they are regarding being animal. Consequently, it can be misleading to describe human beings even

as *willing* their natural end, which is simply what they find their wills essentially directed toward. But since God's willing of the ultimate end is self-directed in the way we have described, it is free in the sense of having no external cause, in having its sole source in God himself. And so for Aquinas it counts as genuine willing even though it cannot involve choice: "in respect of its principal object, which is its own goodness, the divine will does have necessity—not, of course, the necessity of coercion, but the necessity of natural order, which is not incompatible with freedom" (DV q. 23, a. 4). This necessity of natural order is the necessity of a perfect will's willing what a perfect intellect presents to it as perfectly good. It is a necessity compatible with freedom because the necessity of the willing stems only from the impossibility of any obstacle to the will's performing its self-directed function or of any defect in the will's functioning.

So the impression of incompatibility between God's free choice and absolute simplicity is lessened, if not entirely removed, by Aquinas's conception of God's will. When God's acts of will have himself as their object, they are necessary and hence not incompatible with simplicity; and yet their necessity is the necessity associated with a final cause when that final cause is clearly and fully understood as such, and necessity of that sort is not incompatible with the will's freedom.

Furthermore, Aquinas's theory of the nature of will in general and of God's will in particular is enough both to resolve the apparent incompatibility of omnipotence and impeccability and to allay worries about the compatibility of the freedom of the divine will and such conditionally necessitated divine acts as keeping the promise to Abraham. God's keeping his promise to Abraham is conditionally necessitated because once the promise has been made (the condition without which there is no necessitation), he cannot fail to keep it since promise-breaking is wrong (except in circumstances inapplicable to an omniscient, omnipotent being), and it is impossible for an essentially good person to do anything wrong. This sort of conditional necessitation is compatible with the freedom of the divine will in just the same way and for just the same reason as the absolute necessity of God's willing himself does not infringe God's freedom of choice. The necessity in each case is the necessity of the end. Since will is by its nature a self-directed wanting of the good, which is its final cause, when the goodness of some object (such as God's nature, or the keeping of a promise) is not overridden by other considerations, and when the intellect clearly and completely recognizes it as such (as an omniscient intellect cannot fail to do), then the will associated with that intellect necessarily wants that object, not because the will is compelled by anything outside itself to will the object, but because there is no defect or obstacle impeding the will from exercising its self-directed function. In this way God's keeping his promise to Abraham is both freely willed and necessitated by its goodness, which is the final, not the efficient, cause of that divine act. And analogous considerations will apply to

any act which is said to be impossible for God to will because it would be evil for him to do so. Consequently, the paradox of essential goodness is resolved on the basis of Aquinas's theory of will: there is no absurdity in postulating a perfectly good moral agent for whom doing evil is impossible. Furthermore, so far from being incompatible with impeccability, omnipotence in fact entails impeccability on Thomas's theory of will: if the will and its intellect are not defective—that is, if a being is perfect in power with respect to its will and intellect—it follows that that being is impeccable, since only a being defective in intellect or will ever wills evil.

An important part of the apparent incompatibility between divine free choice and absolute simplicity is still left unresolved, however, because it is only God's nature (perfect goodness identical with himself) and conditionally necessitated acts of will (such as keeping his promise) that God is said to will in such a way that he cannot will the contrary, either absolutely or conditionally. His willing of other things is said to be characterized not merely by the absence of any coercion but also by freedom of choice. According to Aquinas, the reason for this difference is that "the ultimate end is God himself, since he is the highest good" (SCG I 74), and "since God wills himself as the end but other things as things that are for the end, it follows that in respect of himself he has only volition, but in respect of other things he has selection (*electio*). Selection, however, is always accomplished by means of free choice" (SCG I 88). Of course these passages must not be read as claiming that God wills his own goodness as the end and everything else he wills as *means* to that end, with the implication that perfect goodness (or God himself) is in the process of becoming fully actualized or is in need of things other than itself for its perfection. Thomas's point is that God's goodness is the final cause for the sake of which he wills other things. So, for example, God wills that a certain sort of animal be rational in order to make a human being, he wills to make a human being in order to complete his making of the universe, and he wills to make the universe because it is good—that is, for the sake of goodness, with which he is identical and which is the end, the final cause, of all his actions (SCG I 86). But that end can be served in various ways, and therein lie the alternatives without which free choice could not be ascribed to God. God might have chosen to create a different universe, provided it was good and created because it was good—e.g., a universe with different physical laws, different elements, different forms of life. And there is reason to suppose that a more fundamental sort of alternative is also open to him. Since goodness, the end served by his actions, is present and perfect even if nothing else exists, because he himself is identical with perfect goodness, it seems open to him not to create at all.

In willing things other than his own nature, then, God's will is not absolutely necessitated to will what it wills. But it does not follow that all the acts of God's

will within the created universe, for example, can be instances of free choice. If God does freely choose to make the promise to Abraham, then some divine actions—such as willing that the promise be communicated to Abraham—will be necessitated by logical considerations, while others will be necessitated by moral considerations—such as willing that the promise be fulfilled. For reasons already stated, neither of those forms of necessitation constitutes a restriction on God's will, but they do preclude ascribing freedom of choice to every divine action having to do with creatures.

So far, then, it may look as if the acts of God's will can be classified into three sorts: first, the one absolutely necessary act of willing himself; second, acts contingent in themselves but conditionally necessitated either logically or morally; and, third, acts that are not only contingent but freely chosen. But an analysis of God's acts of will that entails contingency in God does seem to leave God's willing incompatible with God's simplicity. Any hope of showing the incompatibility to be only apparent must rest on a different analysis of God's acts of will.

Before introducing such an analysis, we want to replace our hitherto serviceable paradigms of God's free choice. There are two reasons why talking to Cain or to Abraham and subjecting Egypt to a hailstorm are not the sort of actions best suited to provide paradigms of free choice or most threatening to simplicity. In the first place, the clearest instances of free choice are cases of choosing between equally good contrary alternatives, and it is far from clear that *not* counseling Cain, *not* promising Abraham a glorious progeny, or *not* punishing a recalcitrant Pharaoh are alternatives as good as those God chooses. In the second place, as we have seen, all such actions in the world are at least *prima facie* explicable as extrinsic accidental characteristics of the unique divine action, various manifestations of the eternal diffusion of divine goodness. But there is an act of the divine will that seems (a) distinguishable from God's willing of himself, (b) representable as a choice between equally good alternatives, and (c) not even *prima facie* explicable as no more than an extrinsic accidental characteristic of God's willing of himself—and that is God's choosing to create. So for the remainder of this discussion we will take creation as the paradigm of God's free choice, although much of what we have to say about this crucial case will apply as well to any other genuine case of divine choice.

### 7. A solution to the problem of God's simplicity and God's free choice

Aquinas's solution to the problem represented in the three-part classification of God's acts of will consists fundamentally in claiming that the third group, those acts that are freely chosen, are like those of the second group in being conditionally necessitated.<sup>22</sup> Because of the implications of absolute simplicity,

Thomas believes that the logical distinction between conditionally and absolutely necessitated acts of divine will does not constitute a real distinction within the divine nature.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, he holds both that God has free choice and that there is no contingency in God himself. Instead, God's nature is altogether necessary, either absolutely or conditionally. And yet Aquinas also maintains that this view of God's nature, this interpretation of absolute simplicity, is entirely compatible with the claim that there is contingency in the created world; the necessity of the Creator and his act of creating does not preclude contingency in what is created.<sup>24</sup>

And so Aquinas's solution to the apparent incompatibility between God's simplicity and God's free choice rests on three highly counter-intuitive claims:

- (i) God's acts of choice are both free and conditionally necessitated;
- (ii) the difference between absolutely and conditionally necessitated acts of will is not a real, metaphysical distinction in God's nature; and
- (iii) the conditional necessity of God's acts of will is compatible with contingency in the object of those acts of will.

It seems to us that if those three claims can be made sense of and adequately supported, God's free choice and absolute simplicity will have been shown to be compatible after all. In that event, what strikes us as the hardest of the problems for the doctrine of simplicity will have been resolved, and the doctrine will have been resuscitated as a respectable, useful part of philosophical theology. We will consider each of the three claims in order.

#### *7(i). Freedom and conditional necessity*

On Aquinas's view, any divine act that is an instance of free choice, such as creation, is necessitated conditionally, but not absolutely. It is not absolutely necessitated because, to put it roughly and briefly, the proposition 'God does not create' does not by itself entail a contradiction.<sup>25</sup> That God's willing to create (or any other act of divine free choice) is conditionally necessitated is a consequence of God's eternity. Because God is timeless, no change in him is possible. If he does will to create, then, it is not possible for him to change and will not to create. Nor can it be supposed that it is open to God either to create or not to create and that he exercises his option to create, because of course this supposition also entails a change in God: that he is first in the state of neither willing to create nor willing not to create and then is in the state of willing to create. So because he is eternal, since he does will to create, the state of not willing to create cannot be attributed to him. Willing to create, then, is necessary to God, but only conditionally necessary, where the condition is the fact that he does will to create.

And so, (A) it is not logically possible for a timeless and otherwise simple

being that creates not to create. That observation about God may seem trivial, for it may seem precisely analogous to this observation about a human being: (B) it is not logically possible for the entity that is Socrates and running *not* to be running. And observation (B) is trivial because, of course, (C) it is logically possible for Socrates not to be running. Although it is necessary that if Socrates is running he is running, it is not necessary that Socrates is running.

Both claims (B) and (C) may be made about Socrates because Socrates can be dissociated from his running in two ways. In the first place, running is just an (intrinsic) accident of Socrates's; Socrates would be Socrates even if he never ran. In the second place, the sort of necessity with which running is connected to Socrates is just the necessity of the present. On the supposition that Socrates is in fact running now, that present state of affairs cannot now be otherwise. And yet, we are entitled to assume, before now it was open to Socrates either to run now or not to run now—i.e., before now Socrates could have exercised (and presumably did exercise) free choice regarding his running now.

But neither of those ways of dissociating Socrates from his running in order to show the triviality of (B) can be used to dissociate God from his creating (or choosing to create<sup>26</sup>), to show that (A) is trivial in the way (B) is. We cannot dissociate God from his creating by claiming that his creating is an intrinsic accident of his, because on the doctrine of simplicity God has no intrinsic accidents. Nor can we dissociate God from his creating merely by pointing out that the necessity with which creating is connected to him does not preclude his freely choosing not to create, because it is not clear that that is true in God's case. The reason why the necessity of Socrates's running while he is running does not preclude his freely choosing not to run is that before the time of his running Socrates could have brought it about that he not be running at that later time. But nothing of that sort can be said of God with regard to his creating. His act of creating is a timeless action in the eternal present, and so it is logically impossible for there to be anything before his act of creating and consequently logically impossible that before the eternal present God do something to bring it about that he does not create in the eternal present.

And yet God's creating is not itself logically necessary or necessitated absolutely; it is not entailed by the laws of logic or by the nature of deity or by the combination of them. Because God is eternal and consequently immutable, we cannot accurately say that God could have willed not to create. But because God's willing to create is not absolutely necessary, we can correctly say that it might have been the case that God willed not to create. If we suppose that the actual world is a world in which God wills to create, then on the doctrine of simplicity (which entails God's eternity), although there are possible worlds in which God wills not to create, none of those worlds lies along any branches of the time-line of the actual world. Considered in the abstract, God's not creating

is logically possible; it is for that reason that God's creating is not absolutely necessary. But given that God is timeless and does will to create, there cannot be a branch of the world's time-line on which not willing to create is correctly ascribed to him. And so God's willing to create is necessary, but only conditionally, given the fact that he does create. And nothing in this sort of necessity impugns the freedom of his will, because which logical possibility is actualized and which logical possibility is left unactualized depends on nothing other than God's will. And yet his willing is necessitated since *as things are* it is not possible that not willing to create ever be correctly ascribed to him.

According to this account, one we think is faithful to the spirit of Aquinas's position on these issues, God is not the same in all possible worlds. That result seems to raise difficulties for other features of Aquinas's conception of God's nature—e.g., for the interpretation of absolute simplicity as entailing the absence of contingency and of accidental properties in God. But the notion of contingent or accidental properties that is operative in Aquinas's understanding of simplicity (the one on which we are building) is confined to one or another set of worlds. The counter-intuitive character of the claims we are now investigating is naturally a function of twentieth-century philosophical intuitions, and it is clear that Aquinas's conceptions of contingency and essentiality differ from those taken for granted by most of us now. The fact that he maintains views entailing both that there is no contingency in God and that God's status as creator is not a feature of God in every possible world strongly suggests that he does not conceive of contingency in terms of differences across possible worlds generally but, rather, in terms of branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state. And so we propose taking Thomas's 'essential', 'necessary', 'accidental', and 'contingent' to refer to modalities that can be determined by inspecting some subset of possible worlds consisting of the branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state—an initial-state set, we will call it.

In a sense, then, we are weakening the claims basic to the doctrine of simplicity. When Thomas maintains that there is only necessity in God, and that whatever is true of him is essentially true of him, we take him to mean the following: Within any initial-state set of possible worlds God's nature is fully and immutably determinate, and it is so as a consequence of the single, timeless act of will in which God wills goodness (himself) and whatever else (if anything) he wills for the sake of goodness in that initial-state set.

Finally, it may seem that Aquinas's position is nevertheless inconsistent; for consider an initial-state set in which God chooses not to create. Isn't it clear that in such a set of possible worlds God must have an unactualized potentiality, his potentiality to create?

Aquinas addresses questions of this sort in SCG I 82. There he argues—per-

suasively, it seems to us—that a will can have open to it an option which it does not take either (a) because it is not actualizing some potentiality it has, or (b) because there is more than one way, equally good, of actualizing the same potentiality. Albert Schweitzer, for example, had open to him the options of becoming either a medical missionary or a concert pianist, and it seems unreasonable to deny that in not opting for the latter career he left unactualized a potentiality he had—an instance of type (a). On the other hand, when the family doctor cures a child's strep throat with Keflex rather than with Ampicillin, it does not seem sensible to say that he leaves some potentiality of his unactualized. Instead, this seems to be an instance of type (b): there is an alternative that is not adopted because the state of the doctor's medical art is such that there is more than one, equally good way for the doctor to actualize his potentiality for practicing medicine.

On Thomas's view, such acts of divine will as creating are instances of type (b). God's end or aim is goodness; he wills what he wills for the sake of goodness. Since according to the doctrine of simplicity he himself is goodness, he is in this respect in the same position as the family doctor: there is more than one, equally good way in which he can achieve his aim, and one of those ways consists in willing just himself and not creating anything.<sup>27</sup> From this point of view it is misleading to say that God has a potentiality for creating—even an unactualized potentiality (in the case of the God-only world)—just as it would be inaccurate to say that the family doctor has an unactualized potentiality for prescribing Ampicillin rather than Keflex. Rather, if it makes sense to ascribe a potentiality to God at all, then God has a potentiality, invariably and ineluctably actualized, for willing goodness, and *this* potentiality is actualized in God's willing himself, whether or not he wills anything other than himself. Therefore, on Thomas's view, even the supposition that God does not will to create—probably the most troublesome supposition for his view that God is entirely actual—would not entail that God has any unactualized potentialities.

It is clear that this account rests on a particular understanding of potentiality, one that distinguishes sharply between potentiality and real possibility. We cannot now provide an exposition of Thomas's theory of potentiality, but we are in any event inclined to think that such an exposition is more than is needed for our present purposes. Thomas's solution to the problem of freedom and conditional necessity, which rests on his notion of potentiality, is a solution to a problem raised by his claim that God is essentially without unactualized potentialities. Consideration of whether his use of '*potentia*' matches the prevailing use of the word 'potentiality' is, then, in an important respect irrelevant to an evaluation of his position; the problem and his solution to it could always be reformulated in different terminology. So in this context it seems to us that the only important consideration regarding Thomas's conception of potentiality is whether or not it

is consistent, and we see no reason to think that it is not.

7(ii). *Two sorts of necessity without a real distinction*

Aquinas's position so far comes to this: the necessitation, absolute or conditional, of everything God wills in no way impugns the freedom of his will; and the conditional rather than absolute necessitation of some of what he wills is compatible with his nature's being completely actual, essential, and non-contingent, in Thomas's understanding of those terms. In order for his position as developed so far to avoid inconsistency, however, it must also include the claim that the difference between absolutely and conditionally necessitated acts of will does not constitute a metaphysical difference in God's nature. God's absolute simplicity entails the absence of any real distinctions within God's nature, and yet Thomas's solution to our problem involves distinguishing conditionally from absolutely necessitated acts of will in God.

Our discussion of this difficulty will be helped by further clarifying the claims of the doctrine of simplicity. As we have seen, maintaining that there are necessarily no metaphysical distinctions in God is not the same as claiming that (a) God is the same in all possible worlds. Rather, it amounts only to claiming that (b) within any given initial-state set of possible worlds there can be no real distinction within God's nature. But God's having some acts of will that are only conditionally necessitated is incompatible only with claim (a), not with claim (b). The conditional necessitation of God's willing to create, for example, presupposes the logical possibility of his not willing to create and so is incompatible with claim (a), but it is entirely compatible with claim (b).

Someone might object that the difference between being conditionally necessitated and being absolutely necessitated does indeed mark a real distinction in God's nature, between the metaphysical "softness" of willing to create (for example) and the metaphysical "hardness" of willing goodness.<sup>28</sup> Willing to create, the objector might say, characterizes God's nature in only some possible worlds, while willing goodness characterizes it in all possible worlds; therefore, there are at least two different sorts of characteristics in the divine nature, distinguished from one another by having or lacking the characteristic of obtaining in all possible worlds.

This objection strikes us as confusing a logical distinction to which we have every right with a metaphysical distinction for which there is no basis. On Thomas's account of God's will, God wills himself and everything else he wills in a single immutable act of will. Because some but not all of the objects of that single act of will might have been other than they are, we are warranted in drawing a logical distinction between the conditionally and the absolutely necessitated objects of that single act of will; but nothing in that warrant licenses the

claim that the act of will is not one and the same, that there are two really distinct acts of will, or one act of will in two really distinct parts. Even if we should go so far as to say that with regard to some but not all of its objects God's will itself might have been different from what it is, this counterfactual claim shows us again only a logical distinction and not a metaphysical difference within the divine will itself; for even with regard to the objects of the will which might have been other than they are, there is no mutability in the will, as we showed in Section 7(i) above in our discussion of Thomas's claim regarding conditional necessity and divine freedom. So the logical distinction between conditionally and absolutely necessitated aspects of the divine will does not reflect a metaphysical difference in which one part of the divine will is more mutable or less ineluctable than another. What the logical distinction does pick out is solely a difference in the ways in which the single immutable act of divine will is related to the divine nature and to other things. But the mere fact that one thing is related in different ways to different things does not entail that it has distinct *intrinsic* properties, only distinct Cambridge properties. The difference between the relationship of the divine will to the divine nature and the relationship of the divine will to creatures stems not from a metaphysical difference in the divine will itself but from metaphysical differences among the diverse objects of that will.

An analogy may help clarify this part of Thomas's position, even though it is fully suitable in only a few respects. If some woman, Monica, looks directly into a normal unobstructed mirror, then in a single glance she sees herself and other things. On any such occasion Monica invariably sees herself, so that in the context of the example her seeing of herself is physically necessitated. But what she sees besides herself will vary from context to context and so is not physically necessitated. We might therefore draw a warrantable logical distinction between the necessitated seeing of herself and the non-necessitated seeing of other things. Still, that logical distinction provides no basis for inferring that there is a real distinction within Monica's *act* of seeing. Her *act* of seeing remains a single undivided glance in spite of its being properly subjected to our logical distinction. The basis for the logical distinction is not some division within Monica's glance but is rather the difference among the objects of her glance and the different ways in which those objects are related to Monica's one undifferentiated act of seeing.

Something like the line of thought in this unsurprising account of familiar circumstances is all Thomas wants or needs with regard to God's single act of will and its differing objects. The fact that we can distinguish conditionally from absolutely necessitated aspects of God's will shows us an appropriate logical distinction but provides no basis on which to infer a metaphysical distinction within the divine will itself.

There is a necessary relationship between God's willing and God's nature

considered as an object of his willing because his will is by definition a wanting of the good and he is identical with goodness. But any other things God wills for the sake of goodness are such that goodness is realizable without them, and so the connection between God's will and these objects of his will is *not* necessary. So the distinction we point out between those aspects of the divine will which could have been otherwise and those which could not reflects a difference in the ways in which the divine will is related to itself and to other things. And these different relationships give rise to different counterfactual truths—e.g. 'God might have willed not to create'; 'Even if God had not willed to create, he would still have willed himself'. But although the differing relationships and differing counterfactuals imply that God is not the same in all possible worlds, they do not show that in any given initial-state set of worlds God's act of will is not one single metaphysically indivisible act. They provide the basis for drawing a conceptual distinction among Cambridge properties of God's will, but because the distinction arises just from considering the different ways in which the divine will can be related to its objects, they do not constitute a metaphysical distinction among God's intrinsic properties any more than Monica's single glance is intrinsically divisible because of the different sorts of objects to which it is related. But absolute simplicity rules out only metaphysical differences within God's nature; it does not and could not provide any basis for objecting to logical or conceptual differences. And so the conceptual distinction between those aspects of the divine nature which could have been otherwise and those which could not is entirely compatible with the doctrine of simplicity.

7(iii). *Necessity in the will and contingency in its objects*

It seems to us, then, that our development of Thomas's position so far justifies the conjunction of the apparently incompatible claims that God's will is free, necessitated either conditionally or absolutely, and devoid of real distinctions. But what about the modal status of created things and temporal events involving them? If all God's willing is necessitated one way or another, how can there be contingency in the creation God wills?

To some extent we have already offered our answer to this question in our discussion of the conditional character of the necessitation of God's will regarding creatures. The nature of that conditional necessitation is not such as to preclude the contingency of the creation or contingency in the created universe. It is, for example, compatible with all of our development of Thomas's position so far to claim that there is a possible world in which God does not will to create, and Thomas himself takes that line when he addresses this problem in SCG I 85:

Conditional necessity in a cause cannot result in absolute necessity in

the effect. But God wills something with regard to creatures not with absolute necessity but only with the necessity that comes from a condition, as was shown above. Therefore, absolute necessity in created things cannot result from the divine will; but it is only absolute necessity that rules out contingency.<sup>29</sup>

But in the same place Thomas provides another way of supporting the same conclusion, one that is worth adding here:

God wills everything that is required for a thing that he wills, as was said. But some things have a nature in accordance with which they have to be contingent, not necessary, and for that reason God wills some things to be contingent. The efficient causality of the divine will requires not only that what God wills to exist exists, but also that it exists in the mode God wills it to exist in.... And so the efficient causality of the divine will does not preclude contingency.<sup>30</sup>

As Thomas sees it, then, one of the reasons why God's absolute simplicity does not entail the absence of contingency in the world created by him is just that part of what God wills with conditional necessity is that there be contingency in what he creates. There is more than one way of explaining how God might do so. We might, for example, suppose that the contents of God's will include references to possible worlds. On that supposition an accurate description of the contents of his will would include not the volition that Rebecca bear twins in Israel at time *t*, but that Rebecca bear twins in Israel at time *t* in worlds  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  (say) but not  $w_3$ . This approach strikes us as interesting but problematic. Thomas's own suggestion seems to be that God wills to create things with components that guarantee their contingency (SCG I 85). His example involves the nature of matter, but a better example might be the free will of human beings, where free will is understood in an incompatibilist sense. By willing to create an entity with such free will, God would bring it about that there is contingency in creation.<sup>31</sup> In any event, then, by one means or another it seems open to an omnipotent being to specify not just the things whose existence he brings about but also the manner in which they exist, including the mode of their existence. And for that reason there is no incompatibility between holding all God's acts of will to be necessitated, whether absolutely or conditionally, and maintaining that at least some features of the world are contingent.

So the three counter-intuitive claims on which Thomas's account of divine simplicity rests can be given a rational interpretation. Consequently, it seems to us that the doctrine of divine simplicity has been shown not to be incoherent in any of the respects in which we have investigated it.<sup>32</sup>

### 8. Implications of the doctrine of divine simplicity

Having worked to defend the coherence of the doctrine of divine simplicity, we want to conclude by saying something about its usefulness. From our discussion earlier in this paper, it is clear that the development of the doctrine and the resolution of its difficulties provide grounds on which to resolve the apparent incompatibility of omnipotence and impeccability and the seeming paradox of essential goodness (with its tension between impeccability and divine free choice). These are important subsidiary results, by-products of the effort to make sense of simplicity. But what we want to bring out now is the more direct importance of the doctrine for the consideration, first, of God's relationship to morality and, second, of the cosmological argument.

The question 'What has God to do with morality?' has typically been given either of two answers by those who take it seriously.<sup>33</sup> God's will is sometimes taken to create morality in the sense that whatever God wills is good just because he wills it: consequently, (TS) right actions are right just because God approves of them and wrong actions are wrong just because God disapproves of them.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, morality is taken to be grounded on principles transmitted by God but independent of him, so that a perfectly good God frames his will in accordance with those independent standards of goodness: consequently, (TO) God approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong. The trouble with (TS) is that it constitutes a theological subjectivism in which, apparently, anything at all could be established as morally good by divine fiat. So although (TS) makes a consideration of God essential to an evaluation of actions, it does so at the cost of depriving the evaluation of its moral character. Because it cannot rule out anything as absolutely immoral, (TS) seems to be a theory of religious morality that has dropped *morality* as commonly understood out of the theory. (TO), on the other hand, obviously provides the basis for an objective morality, but it seems equally clearly not to be a theory of *religious* morality since it suggests no essential connection between God and the standards for evaluating actions. Furthermore, on (TO), the status of the standards to which God looks for morality seems to impugn God's sovereignty.

So the familiar candidates for theories of religious morality seem either, like (TS), to be repugnant to common moral intuitions or, like (TO) to presuppose moral standards apart from God, which God may promulgate but does not produce. For different reasons, then, both these attempts at a theory of religious morality seem inadequate; neither one provides both an objective standard of morality and an essential connection between religion and morality.

The doctrine of divine simplicity entails a third alternative which provides what neither (TS) nor (TO) is capable of. Because God is simple, he is identical

with his goodness; that is, the divine nature itself is perfect goodness. Thus there is an essential relationship between God and the standard by which he judges; the goodness for the sake of which and in accordance with which he acts, in accordance with which he wills only certain things to be morally good, is identical with his nature. On the other hand, because it is God's whole nature, not just his arbitrary decision, which is said to constitute the standard for morality, only things consonant with God's nature could be morally good. According to the doctrine of simplicity, then, God's essential connection with morality provides an objective rather than a subjective moral standard.

These sketchy remarks of course suggest no more than the outline of an objective theological metaethics, and it is a long way from even a fully worked out metaethics to a set of specific moral prescriptions. To progress from the metaethical foundations inherent in absolute simplicity to a full-fledged moral system seems to us to require expounding, defending, and developing the theory—which originated in pagan antiquity and was transmitted by Augustine and Boethius—that 'goodness' and 'being' are different in sense but the same in reference;<sup>35</sup> and such an undertaking is obviously not possible here.<sup>36</sup> But despite the prodigious effort it calls for, a religious morality of the sort that might be based on the doctrine of divine simplicity is, we think, much more promising than its competitors and worth the effort.

The other set of issues in connection with which the doctrine strikes us as making a major difference has to do with the cosmological argument. Some philosophers—Leibniz, for instance—have held that unless we admit the existence of a being that exists necessarily we are reduced to pointing to a brute fact by way of answering the question why there is something rather than nothing, and the principle of sufficient reason leads such philosophers to claim that there cannot be brute facts.<sup>37</sup> Other philosophers, most recently Richard Swinburne,<sup>38</sup> have held the more modest thesis that theism provides a simpler explanation for the universe than atheism does. Swinburne thinks that God is a simpler and thus a more rational stopping-point for explanation than is the universe itself, because "there is a complexity, particularity, and finitude about the universe which cries out for explanation, which God does not have. ...the supposition that there is a God is an extremely simple supposition."<sup>39</sup>

The trouble with Swinburne's thesis is that he rejects the notion of God as an entity whose existence is logically necessary, and so it is not clear why we should share his intuition that theism constitutes a more rational stopping-point for explanation than atheism does. Philosophers such as Leibniz and Clarke, who rest their versions of the cosmological argument on the principle of sufficient reason, do tend to hold that God is a necessary being. But the trouble with their position is that they seem unable to account for the necessity of God's existence even though they appear to be obliged to do so by the very nature of the principle

of sufficient reason that warrants their cosmological arguments. They apparently both cannot find and must have an explanation for the necessity of God's existence. Finally, the principle of sufficient reason, which cosmological arguments depend on, has itself been called into question. William Rowe, for instance, has recently argued that the principle is not a metaphysically necessary truth but rather a logically impossible falsehood.<sup>40</sup>

We think the doctrine of simplicity significantly alters the discussion of all these related issues. In arguing against the principle of sufficient reason, Rowe attempts to show that it is impossible for every contingent fact to have an explanation. A crucial premiss in his argument is the assumption that (R) "For any contingent fact C the fact which explains it cannot be a necessary fact, otherwise C would not be contingent." And he goes on to show that every other possible explanation of any contingent fact C is such that it entails at least one unexplained contingent fact. The effect of the doctrine of simplicity on this intriguing argument is to call (R) into question. As we have explained it here, the doctrine of simplicity entails that God is a logically necessary being all of whose acts of will are at least conditionally necessitated, and that among those acts of will is the volition that certain things be contingent. No matter what the modal status of God's conditionally necessitated acts of will may be, if it is possible for a logically necessary, omnipotent being to will that certain entities or events be contingent, as we have given some reason for thinking it is, then (R) is false. Consequently, a crucial premiss in Rowe's argument against the principle of sufficient reason is false.

Furthermore, the doctrine of simplicity can supply what Clarke's version of the cosmological argument lacks, the explanation of the necessity of God's existence. The answer to the question 'Why does God exist?' is that he cannot not exist, and the reason he cannot not exist is that because he is absolutely simple he is identical with his nature. If his nature is internally consistent, it exists in all possible worlds, and so God, identical with his nature, exists in all possible worlds. The necessity of God's existence is not one more characteristic of God which needs an explanation of its own but is instead a logical consequence of God's absolute simplicity. The short answer to the further question 'Why is God simple?' is 'Because God is an absolutely perfect being, and absolute perfection entails absolute simplicity', and the fuller version of that answer is to be found in Christian rational theology as developed by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, for instance.<sup>41</sup>

Given the doctrine of simplicity, then, it is reasonable to claim that God is an entity whose existence—whose necessary existence—is self-explanatory in the sense that the explanation of the existence of the entity that is absolutely simple is provided entirely by the nature of the entity. And that conclusion supplies the justification, lacking in Swinburne's account, for claiming that God

is a simpler stopping-point for universal explanation than the universe itself is. If we assume that God does not exist, the answer to the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?', or the search for an explanation of all contingent facts, leaves at least one brute fact, at least one inexplicable contingent fact.<sup>42</sup> But given our explanation of the way in which a necessary cause could bring about contingent effects, if God exists and is absolutely simple, the causal chain of contingent facts has its ultimate explanation in a cause that is both necessary and self-explanatory.

The concept of God's absolute simplicity, then, brings with it not only metaphysical intricacy but also considerable explanatory power. Of course our remarks in this concluding section of our paper are not nearly enough to settle the issues raised in it, but we think we have done enough to indicate that if the doctrine of God's absolute simplicity is coherent, as we have worked to show it is, it provides a very promising point of departure of work on some of the most fundamental issues in the philosophy of religion.

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## NOTES

1. The derivation of divine simplicity from such considerations is apparent in Aquinas's *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* (DP) q. 7, a. 1, as Mark D. Jordan has recently pointed out in his article "The Names of God and the Being of Names" in Alfred J. Freddoso, ed., *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 161-190; see esp. pp. 176-179.

2. In this paper, as in our previously published article on God's eternity (see n. 7 below), we proceed on the hypothesis that God is an absolutely perfect (hence absolutely simple) being whose actions and personal characteristics are accurately portrayed and expounded in the Old and New Testaments. We do so because we are interested in presenting and resolving a problem in Christian doctrine, and no conception of God that omits either perfect-being theology or biblical accounts of God as a person can count as fully Christian on a historical understanding of orthodox Christianity. The problem we are concerned with is not exclusively Christian, but we believe that its components as well as some elements of its solution have been most fully developed by Christian theologians and philosophers. In any case, it is that tradition, especially as represented in the work of Thomas Aquinas, on which we draw in our discussion. On the combination of biblical data and rational theology in Christianity see Thomas V. Morris, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm", *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), 177-187.

3. See, e.g., Augustine, *De trinitate* VI, 7-8; Anselm, *Monologion* XVII; Aquinas (besides the source cited in n. 1 above), *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) I 18, 21-23, 31; *Summa theologiae* (ST) Ia q. 3. For the development, criticism, and defense of the doctrine in recent philosophical literature,

see, e.g., Mark D. Jordan's article cited in n. 1 above; Daniel Bennett, "The Divine Simplicity", *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), 628-637; Richard LaCroix, "Augustine on the Simplicity of God," *New Scholasticism* 51 (1977), 453-469; James F. Ross, *Philosophical Theology*, Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969 (esp. pp. 51-63); Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980 (esp. pp. 26-61); and in particular the inter-related articles by William E. Mann, including "The Divine Attributes", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975), 151-159; "Divine Simplicity", *Religious Studies* 18 (1982), 451-471; and "Simplicity and Immutability in God", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), 267-276. For an assessment of some of this work of Mann's, see Thomas V. Morris, "On God and Mann" (forthcoming).

4. In Chapter 4 of his *De trinitate* Boethius draws a distinction between what might be called intrinsic and extrinsic predicates, attempting to find it on a distinction between the first three and the remaining seven Aristotelian categories. Although his attempt has certain obvious shortcomings, we think it has merit and deserves further attention and perhaps further development. See Eleonore Stump, "Hamartia in Christian Belief: Boethius on the Trinity" in D.V. Stump et al., eds., *Hamartia: The Concept of Error in the Western Tradition*, New York & Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983; pp. 131-148.

5. The most familiar problems of this sort are associated with the claim that there can be no real distinction between what God is and its being the case that he is; for God, as for no non-simple entity, essence and existence must be identical. Robert M. Adams has worked at rebutting the familiar philosophical objections to the essence-existence connection and to the concept of necessary existence, and we are in agreement with much of what he says in his articles "Has It Been Proved that All Real Existence is Contingent?" (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971), 284-291) and "Divine Necessity" (*Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), 741-752).

6. Entities existing only at an instant could satisfy that description, and they are sometimes discussed, notably by Duns Scotus. But strictly instantaneous temporal existence strikes us as theoretically impossible.

7. See our article "Eternity", *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429-458.

8. For a discussion of the essential connection between divine goodness and the manifestation of it in things other than God, see Norman Kretzmann, "Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas", *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), 631-649.

9. Bowman Clarke, in commenting on our paper, forcibly and succinctly raised a criticism that had occurred to other auditors and readers as well. He claimed that it is "plainly false" that perfect power is identical with perfect knowledge "unless perfect power bears no resemblance to power, and perfect knowledge to knowledge." While there is indeed an essential resemblance between creaturely attributes such as power and their perfect counterparts among the conceptually distinguishable divine attributes, the resemblance must be confined to the formal, abstract aspect of the attribute. God in his perfect power can raise 100 pounds a foot off the floor, and a man can raise 100 pounds a foot off the floor; but it is inconceivable that the means by which a temporal, material creature achieves that result with some effort be like omnipotent God's doing it in any respect other than, perhaps, the fact that an act of will initiates it. Without now providing details or support, we are willing to say that the same sort of claim can and should be made regarding every divine, perfect  $\phi$  attribute and its corresponding creaturely  $\phi$ . In this same vein, Professor Clarke also objected to our summit-slope analogy, pointing out that a summit is not a perfect slope. At least part of the trouble here is with the apparent contrast between 'perfection' in the sense of 'ideal'—less important for our purposes and sometimes misleading—and 'perfection' in the etymologically fundamental

sense of 'culmination', 'completion'. In that latter, more directly relevant sense, the single summit is indeed the perfection of all the slopes. The slope-summit analogy was intended to suggest that the idea that perfect  $\phi$  and perfect  $\psi$  might be identical despite the plain difference between  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  cannot simply be dismissed as incoherent. Here is one more analogy offered with that same intention. Consider two sets of geometrical elements: A (three two-inch line segments lying parallel to one another) and B (three 60-degree angles with one-inch legs lying with their vertices toward a single point). In this analogy the analogue for the perfection/completion of A and of B is the construction of closed figures involving all three elements of each; and, of course, the resultant figures are identical two-inch equilateral triangles, despite the essential differences between A and B. (We are grateful to Sydney Shoemaker for help with this analogy).

10. See our article "Eternity" (n. 7 above).

11. The question whether God could do what he does not do, or refrain from doing what he does, is a well-recognized problem in the tradition of rational theology. Aquinas, for instance, discusses it several times—e.g., *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* (SENT) I d. 43, q. un., aa. 1 & 2; SCG II 23, 26-27; DP q. 1, a. 5; ST Ia, q. 25, a. 5. But none of the discussions of this problem we have seen associate it specifically with the doctrine of simplicity.

12. This apparent diversity is clearly expressed by Aquinas in such passages as these: "God *necessarily* wills his own being and his own goodness, and he *cannot* will the contrary" (SCG I 80); "in respect of himself God has only volition, but in respect of other things he has selection (*electio*). Selection, however, is always accomplished by means of free choice. Therefore, free choice is suited to God" (SCG I 88); "free choice is spoken of in respect of things one wills *not* necessarily but of one's own accord" (*ibid.*). Notice that even though God's existence and attributes are conceived of here as being *willed* by God, they are expressly excluded from among the objects of God's *free choice*. (We discuss these passages further below.)

13. For developments of this last sort, see, e.g., Nelson Pike, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1969), 208-216; Thomas V. Morris, "The Necessity of God's Goodness" (forthcoming).

14. Besides the article cited in n. 13 above, see, e.g., Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 (esp. Chs. I and II); Joshua Hoffman, "Can God Do Evil?", *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 17 (1979), 213-220; Jerome Gellman, "Omnipotence and Impeccability", *The New Scholasticism* 51 (1977), 21-37.

15. For good recent surveys of the difficulties and significant contributions to the discussion see Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso, "Maximal Power", in *The Existence and Nature of God* (n. 1 above), pp. 81-113; Edward Wierenga, "Omnipotence Defined", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43 (1983), 363-376 (including a very useful bibliography of recent literature on the subject).

16. The conception of God's goodness as exercising final causation, a conception at the heart of Aquinas's account of creation and its relationship to God, seems particularly likely to emphasize the esthetic aspect of perfect goodness at the expense of the moral. See Kretzmann 1983 (n. 8 above), esp. p. 637 and n. 16.

17. Some recent interesting discussion of the will shows signs of moving in the direction of such a conception without any explicit trace of an association with (or even awareness of) Aquinas's account. See, e.g., Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person", *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971), 5-20; Gary Watson, "Free Agency", *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975), 205-220; Susan Wolf, "Asymmetric Freedom", *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 151-166.

18. It is not easy to provide a satisfactory translation of 'appetitus', especially in a single word: 'desire', 'tendency', 'inclination', 'attraction' are all more or less unsatisfactory possibilities. The basic sense of the verb 'appeto' involves the notion of striving after, which also seems to play a part in Aquinas's account of the will. Perhaps the least unsatisfactory one-word counterpart of 'appetitus' is 'wanting', as long as 'wanting' is not understood as implying the absence of the object of *appetitus*. On this basis we could say that for Aquinas the will is a self-directed intellectual wanting of the good, or a self-directed wanting of what is good, essentially connected with some understanding of goodness in general.

19. ST Ia q. 59, a. 1; cf. SCG II 47 and *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (DV) q. 23, a. 1.

20. See, e.g., ST Ia q. 83, a. 1; IaIIae q. 13, a. 16; DV q. 22, a. 6; *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* q. 6.

21. See, e.g., ST Ia q. 82, a. 1: "in practical matters the end plays the role played by the principle in speculative matters, as is said in *Physics* II [9]".

22. See, e.g., SCG II 83; ST Ia. q. 19, a. 3; DP q. 1, a. 5.

23. Thomas's commitment to this position is entailed by his holding both that some of the things God wills are willed with conditional necessity and that God's nature is absolutely simple. See, e.g., ST Ia. q. 19, a. 3 (esp. ad 4) and SCG I 82; cf. DP q. 1, a. 5, ad 5 & ad 6; q. 3, a. 15, ad 6 & ad 11; q. 7, a. 1; a. 6; a. 8, ad 6; a. 10.

24. See, e.g., SCG I 85 and ST Ia q. 19, a. 8.

25. Cf. ST Ia q. 19, a. 3.

26. In the case of an omnipotent being, choosing to do something is tantamount to doing it, and so we will treat God's choosing to create and God's creating as interchangeable characterizations of the eternal action that is at issue here.

27. There are elements of Aquinas's theology not directly relevant to those under consideration here that suggest he is not entitled to this claim; see Kretzmann 1983 (n. 8 above), esp. pp. 632-638.

28. Christopher Hughes offered us an important objection of this sort, one that forced us to try to clarify our position.

29. "Necessitas ex suppositione in causa non potest concludere necessitatem absolutam in effectu. Deus autem vult aliquid in creatura non necessitate absoluta, sed solum necessitate quae est ex suppositione, ut supra (capp. 81 sqq.) ostensum est. Ex voluntate igitur divina non potest concludi in rebus creatis necessitas absoluta. Haec autem sola excludit contingentiam:...."

30. "Vult enim Deus omnia quae requiruntur ad rem quam vult, ut dictum est (cap. 83). Sed aliquibus rebus secundum modum suae naturae competit quod sint contingentes, non necessariae. Igitur vult aliquas res esse contingentes. Efficacia autem divinae voluntatis exigit ut non solum sit quod Deus vult esse, sed etiam ut hoc modo sit sicut Deus vult illud esse:.... Igitur efficacia divinae uoluntatis contingentiam non tollit."

31. For an account of Boethius's explanation of all contingency in terms of free will, see Norman Kretzmann, "Nos Ipsi Principia Sumus: Boethius and the Basis of Contingency" in Tamar Rudavsky, ed., *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, Dordrecht & Boston: D. Reidel, 1984, pp. 23-50.

32. There are, of course, problems for the doctrine of divine simplicity other than those we have dealt with, especially the specifically Christian problems of Trinity and Incarnation. But we hope to have removed enough of the more fundamental obstacles in the way of taking the doctrine seriously to encourage others to look more closely at such further difficulties.

33. Most of this treatment of the issue of religious morality is adapted from Norman Kretzmann,

- "Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality" in *Hamartia* (n. 4 above), pp. 27-50.
34. For an interesting, sophisticated treatment of divine-command theories of morality, see, e.g., Philip Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
35. Scott MacDonald's Cornell Ph.D dissertation (1985) provides a great deal of illumination of the historical development and philosophical implications of this theory.
36. We hope to make some contribution to such an undertaking soon.
37. See, e.g., "On the Radical Origination of Things," tr. Leroy E. Loemker in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters* (2nd edn.), Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969; pp. 486-491.
38. In his book *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 132.
39. Op. cit., p. 130.
40. William Rowe, "Rationalistic Theology and Some Principles of Explanation", *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 357-369.
41. See n. 3 above.
42. As both Swinburne and Rowe argue, in their writings cited in nn. 38 and 40 above.
43. This paper has been presented to various audiences in various drafts and has also been read and commented on by individuals. We have benefited enormously from all the criticisms and suggestions we received in those ways, and we are grateful for all of them. Among those who helped us are William Alston, Bowman Clarke, Leon Galis, Joshua Hoffman, Christopher Hughes, William Mann, Deborah Mayo, Alan McMichael, Philip Quinn, Gary Rosenkrantz, James Ross, Joseph Runzo, Christopher Shields, Fred Feldman, Richard Sorabji, Robert Stalnaker, and John Wippel.