

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 31 | Issue 4

Article 7

10-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Saenz, Noël B. (2014) "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil2014121725

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol31/iss4/7>

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AGAINST DIVINE TRUTHMAKER SIMPLICITY

Noël B. Saenz

Divine Simplicity has it that God is absolutely simple. God exhibits no metaphysical complexity; he has neither proper parts nor distinct intrinsic properties. Recently, Jeffrey Brower has put forward an account of divine simplicity that has it that God is the truthmaker for all intrinsic essential predications about him. This allows Brower to preserve the intuitive thought that God is not a property but a concrete being. In this paper, I provide two objections to Brower's account that are meant to show that whatever merits this account of divine simplicity has, plausibility is not one of them.

Divine simplicity has it that God is absolutely simple. God exhibits no metaphysical complexity; he has neither proper parts nor distinct intrinsic properties. Now modern discussions of divine simplicity have tended to focus exclusively on a version of divine simplicity that makes God identical to a property.¹ But, as has been stressed before, saying that God is a property is highly implausible.² Jeffrey Brower, a proponent of divine simplicity, agrees when he says

the strategy they adopt [the strategy of making God identical to a property] for making sense of simplicity appears not only extreme, but also extremely *ad hoc*. Indeed, it would seem that any account of simplicity that could render the doctrine coherent without giving up the traditional conception of properties would be preferable to them.³

¹William Mann, "Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 18 (1982), 451–471; William Mann, "Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), 343–353; Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?," *Noûs* 24 (1990), 581–598; William F. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), 508–525; William F. Vallicella, "On Property Self-Exemplification: Rejoinder to Miller," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994), 478–481; Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), 165–186.

²For the *locus classicus* of this objection, see Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Marquette University Press, 1980), 47. A similar objection has also been raised by Richard Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23–34.

³Jeffrey Brower, "Making Sense of Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008), 11.



I concur. There is just not much going for this view.⁴ So let's take a look at another, fairly recent, account of divine simplicity. And here we turn to Brower.⁵

According to Brower, there is no need to identify God with a property in order to make sense of divine simplicity. Identifying him as the *truth-maker* for intrinsic essential predications about him will do.⁶ In order to see what leads him to say this, we need to get clear on what Brower takes the doctrine of divine simplicity to be. He says

the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity can be expressed in terms of the requirements it places on divine predications. At least as understood by the medievals, what this doctrine tells us is that if a predication such as "God is good" is true, then there exists an entity, *God's goodness*, that is identical with God; likewise, if "God is powerful" is true, then *God's power* exists and is identical with God; and so on for other such true divine predications.⁷

Summing this up, Brower says that the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity is expressed by, and requires nothing more than, the following:

Simplicity: If an intrinsic predication of the form "God is F" is true, then *God's F-ness* exists and is identical with God.

Brower then argues that Simplicity is ontologically neutral with respect to what God's F-ness is. He says

So understood, the doctrine of divine simplicity takes no stand whatsoever on the precise nature of the entities with which it identifies God. It does

⁴For a way of understanding divine simplicity that perhaps avoids this objection, see Eleonore Stump, "God's Simplicity," in *The Oxford Handbook to Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Stump, in describing Aquinas' view of simplicity, says that "sometimes we have to characterize God with abstract terms—and so we say that God is love—and sometimes we have to characterize him with concrete terms—and so we say that God is loving" (142). So, according to Stump's Aquinas, it is acceptable to say that God is abstract (like a property), so long as this does not rule out God being concrete. So there is something false about conceiving of God as abstract alone or as concrete alone (consider, using Stump's example, that there is something false about conceiving of light as a wave alone or a particle alone). Given this view of divine simplicity (what Stump calls "a quantum metaphysics"), the objection considered in the main text has little bite (though this is only because we are now, at least in large part, mystifiers with respect to the kind of thing God is). As an anonymous referee rightly points out, this shows us that "getting clear on what the doctrine is makes a difference to its evaluation."

⁵I have been told that the view to be presented is actually quite faithful to the view that Aquinas and other medievals had of divine simplicity. If this is true, then this view is far from being a recent account of divine simplicity (even if it is, as Jeffrey Brower made clear in personal correspondence, a contemporary statement of it).

⁶Brower, "Making Sense of Divine Simplicity"; Jeffrey Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For others who have it that God is the truthmaker for his intrinsic essential predications, see Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower, "A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity)," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Alexander R. Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷Brower, "Making Sense," 5–6.

assume that there are (or at least could be) entities corresponding to expressions such as "God's goodness," "God's power," and "God's wisdom." Nonetheless, it says nothing about the specific ontological category to which they belong.⁸

From this, Brower concludes that in order to avoid identifying God with a property, all we have to do is accept the intuitively plausible *truthmaker account of predication*:

Truthmaker: If an intrinsic predication of the form "*a* is *F*" is true, then *a*'s *F*-ness exists, where this entity is to be understood as the *truthmaker* for [*a* is *F*].⁹

That Truthmaker avoids identifying God with a property should be obvious. For instead of identifying *a*'s *F*-ness with a property, Truthmaker identifies it with that which makes true *<a is F>* and there is no reason to think that the truthmaker, at least in this case, is a property. As Brower says, "to characterize an entity as a truthmaker is to characterize it in terms of a certain metaphysical function or role," viz., that of making some proposition true.¹⁰ This, according to Brower, "leaves open the possibility that truthmakers can belong to ontological categories of very different kinds, including both *concrete individuals* (such as persons) and *properties*."¹¹

Furthermore, with respect to intrinsic essential predications such as *<Plato is a human>* and contingent predications such as *<Plato is wise>*, Brower thinks that all that is required as a truthmaker for the former, but not the latter, is Plato.¹² That it is plausible that only Plato is required to make true *<Plato is a human>* is due to its being the case that part of what it is to be Plato is to be human; being human is essential to Plato. However, this line of reasoning does not hold for *<Plato is wise>* since being wise is not part of what it is to be Plato. Now since the reason for thinking that Plato is a truthmaker for his essential predications generalizes, we can say that concrete individuals are, in general, truthmakers for their true intrinsic essential predications.

So Simplicity, when coupled with Truthmaker, and given what was just said concerning intrinsic essential predications, entails that God is identical with the truthmakers for his intrinsic essential predications. This result is not absurd. As Brower says

⁸Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 109.

⁹I will use "*<p>*" to stand for "the proposition that *p*."

¹⁰Brower, "Making Sense," 18.

¹¹Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 111.

¹²Brower does not elaborate on what he means by "essential." But I take it that in order for a predication to be an essential predication, it must be a predication that is, in some sense, central to what the thing is (see Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality," *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 [1994], 1–16; Michael Gorman, "The Essential and the Accidental," *Ratio* 18 [2005], 276–289). So it is not enough that some predication of *x* is necessarily true of *x* in order for that predication to be an essential predication of *x*. If we want an essential predication of *x*, that predication needs to be, at least in part, central to, or about the identity of, *x*.

the truthmaker interpretation goes considerable distance toward rendering the doctrine of divine simplicity coherent. On this interpretation, for example, the doctrine does not require that God is identical with each of his properties, and hence is himself a property. In fact, it does not even require that God has any properties at all (in the ontologically loaded sense of exemplifiables). On the contrary, all the doctrine requires is that, for every true intrinsic divine predication, there is a truthmaker and God is identical with that truthmaker. But there is nothing obviously absurd about that.¹³

So appealing to Truthmaker both avoids the absurd result that God is identical with a property and allows God to be a concrete individual. This is good.

But is it good enough? No. For even though I am willing to agree with Brower that his brand of simplicity, which I will henceforth call *Divine Truthmaker Simplicity* (“DTS” for short), is more believable than the brand that identifies God with a property, I think there are good reasons to think it implausible. So in each of §1 and §2, I will provide an argument for thinking that DTS is implausible.¹⁴ In §3, I will show why these arguments are useless against a view according to which God is complex.

1. The Truthmaker Argument

That God is the truthmaker for his intrinsic essential predications would seem to rely on the following principle:

Essential: For any concrete x , if $\langle p \rangle$ is an intrinsic essential predication of x , then x makes $\langle p \rangle$ true.

But why accept Essential? It does not strike me as obvious, and Brower’s only defense of it requires appealing to its seeming plausibility. Brower says

it does seem plausible to think that a concrete individual can be the truthmaker for a proper subset of its true essential predications—namely, each of its true intrinsic essential predications.¹⁵

Turning to God, Brower says

This interpretation of simplicity seems promising if we focus on predications such as “God is divine,” “God is good,” and “God is powerful.” For in each of these cases, God can plausibly be regarded as their truthmaker.¹⁶

So for Brower, Essential appears plausible and this, it would seem, is why he accepts it. But I do not have this plausibility intuition. And even if I did, I would reject it. Here is why. Truthmakers are supposed to be that which

¹³Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity,” 112.

¹⁴For an argument against DTS that differs from mine, see William F. Vallicella, “Divine Simplicity,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2014 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/divine-simplicity/>.

¹⁵Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity,” 111.

¹⁶Brower, “Making Sense,” 19.

gives a metaphysical ground of truth, and grounds are supposed to be explanatory in nature.¹⁷ That is, if x makes $\langle p \rangle$ true, then x (or x 's existence) metaphysically explains why $\langle p \rangle$ is true.¹⁸ As Brower himself says

when a predication of the form “ a is F ” is true, there must be something that makes it true—or better, some thing (or plurality of things) which explains its truth or *in virtue of* which it is true. As these qualifications indicate, the notion of “making” at work here is not causal, but explanatory.¹⁹

So if x fails to metaphysically explain (or as I will sometimes just say, *explain*) that $\langle p \rangle$ is true, then x fails to make $\langle p \rangle$ true. This tells against Essential. To use Brower's example, take an intrinsic essential predication of Plato, $\langle \text{Plato is a human} \rangle$ and ask “what makes this proposition true?” Notice that the answer cannot be Plato. Why? Because saying that this proposition is true in virtue of Plato or that Plato makes it true, and therefore explains why it is true that he is human, is explanatorily empty. Listing Plato as that which makes true $\langle \text{Plato is a human} \rangle$ is of no help in telling me what it is that metaphysically explains that it is true that he is a human. Notice that I am not simply claiming that I cannot see how Plato explains the truth of $\langle \text{Plato is a human} \rangle$ (which, if true, could be a mere epistemic shortcoming on my part). Rather, I am claiming that I can see that he doesn't explain it. Plato, the concrete being, is just not rich enough to provide, on his own, a metaphysical ground of the truth of $\langle \text{Plato is a human} \rangle$.²⁰ However, if the answer to the above question is that the proposition is true because Plato instantiates *being a human*, or that the state of affairs of Plato's being a human explains that it is true that Plato is a human, then I have been told something that is explanatorily helpful.²¹ I have been told not merely that

¹⁷For others who accept this claim, see, inter alia, Gideon Rosen, “Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction,” in *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, ed. Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Jonathan Schaffer, “The Least Discerning and Most Promiscuous Truthmaker,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 60 (2010), 307–324; Paul Audi, 2012. “A Clarification and Defense of the Notion of Grounding,” in *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, ed. Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Michael Clark and David Liggins, “Recent Work on Grounding,” *Analysis* (2012), 1–12; Kit Fine, “A Guide to Ground,” in *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, ed. Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ross Cameron, “Truthmakers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Truth*, ed. Michael Glanzberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁸The use of “metaphysical” here is to contrast the kind of explanation under discussion with causal explanations. That Jill threw the ball provides a causal, and not a metaphysical, explanation for the breaking of the window. That Plato is wise provides a metaphysical, and not a causal, explanation for the truth of $\langle \text{Plato is wise} \rangle$.

¹⁹Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity,” 110.

²⁰It is important to note here that there needs to be more to a metaphysical explanation than necessitation. Plato necessitates that $\langle 2 + 1 = 3 \rangle$ is true. But of course, he does not explain it. So the mere fact that Plato necessitates (as he surely does) that $\langle \text{Plato is a human} \rangle$ is true does very little, if anything, with respect to establishing him as an explanation for the truth of $\langle \text{Plato is a human} \rangle$.

²¹Of course, it is no part of truthmaker theory that for every predicate, there is a corresponding property. So perhaps there is no property *being a human*. No problem, for even

Plato exists, but something about how Plato intrinsically is. And *how* Plato intrinsically is, as opposed to *whether* Plato is, metaphysically explains (and so grounds) that a proposition about how Plato intrinsically is has the property of being true.

All this should be rather unsurprising. Intrinsic predications involve descriptions of the world. They involve saying that the world (or one of its inhabitants) is some way. But then it should come as no surprise that whatever makes such predications true must involve how the world in fact is (or how one of its inhabitants in fact is). There needs to be a kind match between what is true and its truthmaker. If it is true that something is some way, then what makes it true must be structured in the right kind of way if it is to explain why the predication applies to it. Plato is just not structured in the way he needs to be if he is to explain why “is a human” applies to him.²² But then Plato cannot explain why <Plato is a human> is true.

I have been given the following response: For the advocate of DTS, pointing to Plato as that which makes true <Plato is a human> is a way of pointing to the essence of Plato, and that essence of Plato comes pre-built with what you are calling “how things (intrinsically and essentially) are.” The essence of Plato is pre-built as being a human. Pointing to Plato, then, is a way of pointing to the truthmaker.

But it is not at all clear how this helps matters, and for three reasons. First, even if pointing to Plato is a way of pointing to the truthmaker, it does not follow that Plato is the truthmaker (consider, pointing to a picture of Plato can be a way of pointing to him, but it does not follow from this that the picture is Plato). Second, how should we understand “pre-built”? On its most natural reading, the thought here is that if essences come pre-built with how things intrinsically and essentially are, then the essence is given to us as being composed by how the thing it is an essence of intrinsically and essentially is. But with respect to God, this cannot be the case if divine simplicity is true. God *is* his essence, and since God exhibits no metaphysical complexity, then neither does his essence. But his essence would if it were composed by how God intrinsically and essentially is. So until a meaning is given to “pre-built” that does not entail that God is complex, the present response is, at best, inconclusive. Third, even if how things intrinsically and essentially are is pre-built into the essences of

if you think that this property does not exist, the point still holds. What we need here is something about how Plato is (a state of affairs or trope), and not merely that Plato is.

²²Notice that this is not to deny that Plato is structured. For suppose we accept a constituent ontology according to which concrete objects like Plato have properties as constituents. This is perfectly consistent with saying that Plato alone is not structured in the right kind of way to make <Plato is a human> true. Of course, if we accept a constituent ontology, there is a sense in which Plato has “within himself” that which makes true <Plato is a human>, namely, the state of affairs *Plato's being human* or the trope *Plato's human-ness*. But this is not tantamount to saying that Plato himself is what which explains that <Plato is a human> is true. If anything, it is to concede that Plato is not the truthmaker but that a state of affairs or trope (things fundamentally different from Plato) “within” Plato are.

those very things, it does not follow that the things that have the essences are good explanations for truths about their essences. That is, even if one could point to the essence of a thing simply by pointing to the thing that has the essence, it does not follow that the thing is a good explanation for the truth of an intrinsic essential predication about the thing. Explanation is hyper-intensional. If x explains y , and x is intimately associated with z such that x necessitates z and vice-versa (as the instantiated essence of a thing necessitates the thing and vice-versa), it does not follow that z also explains y . It *would* follow if this intimate association were identity (which is precisely what divine simplicity theorists will say since according to divine simplicity, God is his essence). But this is, in large part, what my argument is questioning. Plato does not explain certain truths about how he intrinsically and essentially is. That Plato is some intrinsic, essential, way does. So Plato is not identical to how he intrinsically and essentially is. Therefore, on pain of begging the question, the present response has little to no force against the present objection.

Here is a related response.²³ Suppose we take the old-fashioned definition of a human as a rational animal. If, then, you beheld Plato himself—not just his bare existence, of course—you would or could “see” that he’s rational, and that he’s an animal, and that such are essential to him. So Plato does provide enough—if only one can understand him well enough—to explain the truth that Plato is a human. This is so even if it would be explanatorily empty for us to merely point at Plato in order to explain the truth that Plato is a human. Nonetheless, it would seem that the grounds of explanation are there, in Plato.

But notice that, according to this response, to behold Plato himself requires to behold not just Plato, but how Plato essentially is. It is to behold that Plato is rational, and an animal, and that these are essential to him. So of course Plato, *when beheld in this way*, provides enough to explain the truth that Plato is a human since to behold Plato in this way is just to consider how Plato essentially is. So what is doing the explanatory work here is not really Plato, but how Plato essentially is. This is precisely what I am arguing for. In agreement with this response, Plato does *provide* enough (by being essentially human) even if Plato is not enough. In agreement with this response, the ground of the truth that Plato is a human is there, *in* Plato (because Plato is essentially human), even if this ground is not Plato himself. So really, this response is in complete agreement with me in suggesting that what Plato provides, or what is in Plato (namely, his being essentially some way), as opposed to Plato himself, does explain that it is true that he is a human.

So, I claim, it is not Plato, but rather how Plato is, that explains why a proposition about how Plato is has the property of being true. A proposition about how Plato is has the property of being true in virtue of how Plato is and not in virtue of Plato. So Essential, which is required for DTS,

²³I would like to thank an anonymous referee for this response.

is false. DTS is therefore in trouble. Now Essential (perhaps) has some recent historical support in the work of David Armstrong, a champion of truthmaking.²⁴ Therefore, one cannot be accused of engaging in completely aberrant theorizing about truthmaking if they accept Essential. But of course, the point still holds. Insofar as truthmakers are supposed to metaphysically explain why truths are true (as Brower himself accepts), merely appealing to a thing in order to explain why intrinsic essential claims about that thing are true is to provide a truthmaker that is too course-grained. We (including Armstrong) need to dig deeper, and provide more structure in our ontology, if we want satisfactory truthmakers here.

Notice that this argument against Essential does not call

Truthmaker: If an intrinsic predication of the form "*a* is *F*" is true, then *a*'s *F*-ness exists, where this entity is to be understood as the *truthmaker* for [*a* is *F*].

into question. It is consistent with everything said above that *a*'s *F*-ness makes true *<a is F>* so long as (at least in many cases) *a*'s *F*-ness is not identical to *a*.²⁵ For example, it is consistent with everything said above that Plato's human-ness makes true *<Plato is a human>* so long as Plato's human-ness is not identical to Plato. This shows us that there exists a tension between Truthmaker and

²⁴David M. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98. It is worth noting here that even before Armstrong came on the truthmaking scene, Mulligan, Simons, and Smith already had it that things are not truthmakers for intrinsic essential truths about them (see Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Truth-Makers," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 44 (1984), 300). So there is even earlier recent historical support for rejecting Essential.

²⁵An anonymous referee suggested the following case as a counter-example to the claim just made in the main text:

It is true that goodness is good.

The goodness of goodness makes *<Goodness is good>* true.

The goodness of goodness is identical to goodness.

But I think this case fails. Here is why: The third claim, that the goodness of goodness is identical to goodness, is plausible because we are taking "the goodness of goodness" to refer simply to the property that goodness, in this case, instantiates, namely *goodness*. Obviously, if "the goodness of goodness" refers simply to the property goodness, then the goodness of goodness is identical to goodness. But if so, then it is no longer obvious that the goodness of goodness makes *<Goodness is good>* true. This is so because it is by no means obvious that the property goodness makes it true that goodness is good. Indeed, the very same argument for thinking that Plato does not make it true that Plato is a human because Plato fails to explain why *<Plato is a human>* is true works in this case. What explains the truth of *<Goodness is good>* is something about how goodness is. We need goodness to be some way, namely good, in order for it to be the case that *<Goodness is good>* is true. Appealing simply to goodness in order to explain that it is true that goodness is some way is explanatorily unsatisfactory. So if "the goodness of goodness" refers simply to the property goodness, then the second claim in the above case is suspect. However, if "the goodness of goodness" does not refer simply to the property goodness, then the third claim in the above case is suspect. So "the goodness of goodness" refers either to the property goodness or it does not. If it does, then the second claim is false. If it does not, then the third claim is false. Either way, the above case involves a false claim.

Simplicity: If an intrinsic predication of the form "God is F" is true, then *God's F-ness* exists and is identical with God.

According to Truthmaker, God's omnibenevolence makes <God is omnibenevolent> true. But according to Simplicity, God's omnibenevolence = God. However, God does not make <God is omnibenevolent> true for the very same reason that Plato does not make <Plato is a human> true. Merely pointing to God as an answer to "what makes <God is omnibenevolent> true?" is explanatorily empty. As with Plato, what we need here is something about *how* God is and not merely *whether* God is. So God does not explain why <God is omnibenevolent> is true. But then, given Simplicity, neither does God's omnibenevolence, which contradicts Truthmaker.²⁶ Therefore, either Truthmaker or Simplicity has to go. But since both are required by DTS, then DTS must go as well.

2. *The Divine Predications Argument*

There exists a kind of priority ordering between God's intrinsic essential predications.²⁷ God's intrinsic essential predications are not simply a list of predications every one of which is independent from every other. They are rather a unified and elegant lot. There is an order amongst them such that the truth of some "flow" from the truth of other more basic ones. Brower himself accepts this when he accepts that

(1) God is wise because God is divine.²⁸

That God is divine is more basic or fundamental than that God is wise. That God is divine explains that God is wise.²⁹ Alternatively, it might strike many that the reversal is true

²⁶Notice that it does not, in order to make it plausible that God explains that <God is omnibenevolent> is true, help to refer to God with the name "God's omnibenevolence." For notice the analogous move one could make in the case of Plato. One could decide to refer to Plato with the name "Plato's human-ness" and say that it is Plato's human-ness that makes <Plato is a human> true. But it does not follow from deciding to call Plato a certain name that Plato is now a plausible explanation for the truth of <Plato is a human>. So it does not follow from referring to God with the name "God's omnibenevolence" that God is now a plausible explanation for the truth of <God is omnibenevolent>.

²⁷Be careful! Predications about God are not properties of God. The former involve propositions describing God whereas the latter involve the ways God is.

²⁸Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 117. Notice that claims like (1) cannot involve properties of God since, according to DTS, God plausibly lacks such properties. Instead, they involve predications about God. Another way to state (1) is as follows:

<God is wise> is true because <God is divine> is true.

For stylistic reasons, I have decided, in (1) and (2), to express dependency claims concerning predications about God without the use of angle brackets and the property of being true.

²⁹Brower accepts other similar claims when he says

For as the foregoing list makes clear, the God of traditional theism possesses intellectual states like knowledge (in virtue of which he is omniscient), and appetitive states like desires or volitions (in virtue of which he is perfectly good or loving). ("Simplicity and Aseity," 106)

(2) God is divine, at least in part, because God is wise

That God is wise is more basic or fundamental than that God is divine. That God is wise partly explains that God is divine.

Now what we have here between (1) and (2) are jointly exhaustive, mutually exclusive, positions. Jointly exhaustive because it is just false that the truth of <God is wise> is not in any way explanatorily related to the truth of <God is divine>. Focusing on (1), notice how natural it is to think that God is wise (and good, and powerful, and just) because God is divine. As Brower says

Traditional theists standardly derive the intrinsic divine attributes (or better, the truth of predications involving them) from their understanding of the divine nature. That is to say, they take God to be not only good, powerful, wise, and just, but to be all these things in virtue of being divine.³⁰

Mutually exclusive because (1) and (2) cannot both be true on pain of violating the irreflexivity of explanation. If God is wise because God is divine, and God is divine, at least in part, because God is wise, then it follows, by the transitivity of explanation (or partial explanation), that God is wise, at least in part, because God is wise. But this is false. That God is wise is not at all explained, even in part, by itself. So we must choose either (1) or (2) and we cannot choose both. Let us, for sake of argument, accept (1) (the argument to follow would work just as well if we instead accepted (2)).

Here is a question everyone, and so the divine simplicity theorist, has to answer: what explains the pattern of dependency among the truth of the predications expressed in (1)? That is, why is it that the truth of one predication, that God is wise, depends on the truth of another, that God is divine, rather than the other way around? In short, why (1) rather than (2)? This question must have an answer. That one *predication* is true in virtue of another *predication* is not a fundamental fact. Predications, and their exemplifying a dependence order, are not brute, primitive, entities or facts. Perhaps there is nothing that explains why certain *properties* obtain in virtue of other *properties*, but predications are not properties. That a predication is true in virtue of another predication is a semantic fact and semantic facts are not (at least generally) part of the fundamental story of the world (indeed, it is precisely this intuition which undergirds the belief that a proposition's being true (which is a semantic fact) requires a truthmaker (something in the world that metaphysically explains its truth)). So the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1) must have an explanation on pain of allowing (1), which is a semantic fact, to go ungrounded.

What then could explain this pattern? Perhaps the answer is that (1) is a conceptual truth, and so what explains why God is wise because God

So according to Brower, God is, at least in part, omniscient in virtue of possessing certain intellectual states and is, at least in part, good in virtue of possessing certain appetitive states.

³⁰Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 117.

is divine, and not vice-versa, has to do with the concepts WISDOM and DIVINITY. Consider how the concepts BACHELOR, UNMARRIED, and MALE explain the pattern of dependency in

(3) Bill is a bachelor because Bill is an unmarried male.

BACHELOR is made up of, or composed or constituted by, UNMARRIED and MALE, and it is precisely because of this that Bill is a bachelor because he is an unmarried male and not the other way around. It would be conceptually incoherent to think that Bill is an unmarried male because he is a bachelor. It is a conceptual truth that anyone who satisfies BACHELOR does so in virtue of satisfying UNMARRIED and MALE since BACHELOR decomposes into UNMARRIED and MALE. And it is a conceptual falsehood that anyone who satisfies UNMARRIED and MALE does so in virtue of satisfying BACHELOR since neither UNMARRIED nor MALE decomposes into bachelor. So the pattern of dependency exemplified in (3) is explained by appealing to the pattern of dependency exemplified by the concepts involved in (3). Unfortunately, this kind of explanation will not work in our present case. After all, (2) is a conceptually coherent claim. One could defend (2) against (1) without being confused about the concepts WISDOM and DIVINITY. It is a live debate whether we should accept (1) over (2), as it would not be if the disagreement over them boiled down to a disagreement over the concepts involved (as it plausibly does in the bachelor case). (1) is therefore not a conceptual truth. Brower agrees when, to paraphrase him, he says that it is a real question whether the list of divine predications (God is good, powerful, wise, just) depend on the predication of God's being divine, but that it is at least coherent to say that they do.³¹ But it wouldn't be a real question if (1) were a conceptual truth. If (1) were a conceptual truth, the question would be settled decisively in favor of (1).

Therefore, in accordance with what Brower indicates, the disagreement over whether (1) or (2) is true, which is just a disagreement over the pattern of dependency involved, is not a disagreement over the pattern of dependency exemplified between the concepts involved. Rather, it is a disagreement about how the world is. That is, it is not a *conceptual* disagreement, but a *worldly* disagreement. So what explains the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1) has to do with the world and not our concepts of the world.

In looking to the world, an initially plausible explanation of the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1) is the following:

(4) God's wisdom exists because God's divinity exists.

Here, appeal is made to God's wisdom and divinity (as worldly entities as one can ask for). Moreover, what explains the pattern of dependency in (1) is simply that one of these worldly entities (God's wisdom) exists in virtue

³¹Ibid., 117

of the other (God's divinity). The thought here is that the pattern of dependency that holds for predications is explained by that which holds for certain worldly items. There is a certain fit of direction that exists between the dependency of predications on predications and worldly entities on worldly entities. That is, if x 's F-ness exists because x 's G-ness exists, then this explains that x is F because x is G. Now this fit of direction strikes me as quite plausible. However, and unfortunately for the proponent of DTS, appealing to it in order to explain the pattern of dependency involved in (1) will not do. In order to see why, recall that DTS is committed to

Simplicity: If an intrinsic predication of the form "God is F" is true, then God's F-ness exists and is identical with God.

Now it follows from the intrinsic essential predications involved in (1) and Simplicity that God's wisdom exists and is identical to God, and that God's divinity exists and is identical to God. But this, in conjunction with (4), entails that God exists because God exists, which is false. Nothing (not even God) can explain its own existence. Explanation is irreflexive and so what explains God's existence (if anything does) cannot be God's existence. Moreover, we should balk at the claim that God's existence is explained at all (even if what explains it is God's existence). For if God is *a se*, then God does not exist because of anything, *a fortiori*, does not exist because of his existence.³² So, on pain of saying that God's existence depends on itself, we cannot maintain that God's wisdom exists because God's divinity exist—(4) must go. So even though it is true that God is wise because God is divine, it cannot follow that God's wisdom exists because God's divinity exists on pain of violating the irreflexivity of explanation and on pain of violating God's aseity (something the proponent of divine simplicity will be at pains to preserve).

Is there anything left to explain the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1)? Here the DTS theorist will most likely appeal to God. God is what explains the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1). But this strains credulity. How is it that God alone can explain this pattern of dependency? After all, the existence of God is clearly consistent with the pattern of dependency expressed in (2). But then what reason is there to say that God explains the pattern exemplified in (1) but not (2)? For the DTS theorist, what is it about God that gives us (1) and not (2)? What is it about God that favors accepting (1) over (2)? There must be an answer to this. Unfortunately, given DTS's commitment to God's simplicity, I do not see how there could be. If simple, God is just not structured in the right

³²I should note that the view of aseity at work here is the strong view (but is, I think, the view of aseity that proponents of divine simplicity accept). As an anonymous referee points out, one can understand God's aseity as God's existence not depending on anything (that is how I have understood it), or one can understand it as his existence not depending on anything outside of God. If the latter, then it can be that God's existence depends on something so long as it depends on something else about God (say, his essence or some essential feature of God).

kind of way (because he is not structured at all) to explain the pattern of dependency in (1). If simple, there can be nothing about God that favors accepting (1) over (2). So appealing to God alone is not the answer to our question. Instead, appeal must be made to how God is and not simply that he is.

It is important not to confuse this worry with another worry that Brower addresses. Here is this other worry: how can an absolutely simple thing make true a variety of distinct predications? Brower's response is to note that it is at least coherent that all, save one, of God's non-formal, intrinsic essential predications depend for their truth on the predication that God is divine. So, as was made clear above, according to Brower, God is good, powerful, wise, and just because God is divine. Now since God is the truthmaker for <God is divine>, and since explanation is transitive and the truth of <God is divine> explains the truth of <God is good>, <God is powerful>, <God is wise>, and <God is just>, it follows that God is the truthmaker for all of these latter predications. So according to Brower, there is, in principle, no problem with God making true a variety of distinct predications. Notice though that none of this even begins to explain why the truth of <God is divine> explains the truth of <God is wise>. Rather, Brower simply assumes that it does and uses it to deflect a potential problem with DTS. But coming up with an explanation for why the truth of <God is divine> explains the truth of <God is wise> is precisely the worry that this section is concerned with. It is a worry that involves explaining, not how God can make true a variety of distinct predications about him, but how God can explain a pattern of dependency exemplified between distinct predications about him.

In light of all this, I am inclined to think that DTS has to take it as brute that the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1) holds.³³ This is a mark against it. As I stressed above, that one predication is true in virtue of another predication, and not the other way around, is not a fundamental, unexplained, fact. It is a semantic fact, and semantic facts ultimately require a ground or explanation that appeals to the non-semantic world. However, since I cannot see what someone who accepts DTS could accept as a plausible explanation for the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1), then I issue the following challenge: come up with an entity (or entities) that, if it exists (or if they exist), plausibly explains the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1).

3. *Divine Truthmaker Complexity*

Let us contrast DTS with another view of God which I will call *Divine Truthmaker Complexity* ("DTC" for short), where DTC is the conjunction of Truthmaker and

³³In fact, I think the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1) has to be taken as brute for any version of divine simplicity.

Complexity: If an intrinsic predication of the form “God is F” is true, then God’s F-ness exists and is not identical with God.

The above two arguments against DTS do not tell against DTC. Consider what was central to the first argument, viz. that we need an adequate truthmaker for intrinsic essential predications of God. DTC has no problem providing such truthmakers since such propositions are true in virtue of the essential intrinsic properties God instantiates. <God is F> is true because God’s F-ness exists, where God’s F-ness is that state of affairs or trope of God instantiating F-ness. So DTC, unlike DTS, is not committed to the claim that such propositions are true in virtue of God, which is explanatorily empty.

Turning to the second argument, DTC can explain the pattern of dependency exemplified in

(1) God is wise because God is divine.

Recall the plausibility of saying that the pattern of dependency exemplified between predications is explained by the pattern of dependency exemplified between certain worldly items. There is a certain fit of direction that exists between the dependency that holds between predications and the dependency that holds between worldly entities. If x ’s F-ness exists because x ’s G-ness exists, then this explains that x is F because x is G. Now DTC can (and should) say that God’s wisdom exists, that God’s divinity exists, that God’s wisdom is distinct from God’s divinity, and that God’s wisdom exists because God’s divinity exists. But then DTC has all it needs to explain the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1). The pattern of dependency exemplified in (1) is explained by the pattern of dependency in states or tropes involving how God is. So DTC, unlike DTS, is able to provide a satisfying explanation for the pattern of dependency exemplified in (1). DTC, unlike DTS, imports enough structure into God in order to explain both the truth of intrinsic essential predications about God and the pattern of dependency exemplified in certain predications involving God.

4. Conclusion

Brower’s goal in presenting and defending DTS is to make sense of divine simplicity; his goal is to show that divine simplicity is a coherent position.³⁴ Moreover, Brower hopes that showing this will “help to shift contemporary discussion of the doctrine away from questions about its coherence to questions about its plausibility.”³⁵ Now as I hope is clear, this paper concedes that Brower has met his goal. The objections I have raised against DTS do not concern its coherence but its plausibility. Divine simplicity is, in principle, coherent. So I think that we should shift the

³⁴Brower, “Making Sense,” 20.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 20.

contemporary discussion away from questions of coherence to questions of plausibility. And once we do, I think the verdict should be that divine simplicity, as understood by Brower, is implausible. For divine simplicity gets the facts about what God makes true wrong and is (at least as far as I can tell) unable to explain the pattern of dependency exemplified between certain predications about God. But no view of God should get the facts about what God makes true wrong. No view of God should be unable to explain the pattern of dependency exemplified between certain predications about God. So even if we grant, as I do, that divine simplicity is coherent, I do not think we should grant that it is plausible. Whatever merits divine simplicity has, I doubt that plausibility is one of them.³⁶

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³⁶This paper was written in 2012/2013 while I was on fellowship at the University of Notre Dame's Center for Philosophy of Religion. I would like to thank the Center both for its support during that time and for the excellent feedback I received while there. I would also like to thank the audience at the 2013 SCP Mountain-Pacific Region Conference where this paper was presented. Special thanks go to Jeffrey Brower, Travis Dumsday, and Tim Pawl for providing detailed comments on earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Amy Greenip, for her always present support and encouragement in my work.