



Divine Simplicity: A New Assessment

Seyyed Jaaber Mousavirad 

Associate Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology,
Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran. mousavirad@atu.ac.ir

Abstract

Original Research



One of the attributes traditionally ascribed to God by medieval philosophers is divine simplicity. This article explores the various interpretations of divine simplicity presented by medieval thinkers, evaluating their philosophical plausibility. It addresses the concept of divine simplicity primarily with respect to the absence of plurality in the divine essence. While God is free from material multiplicity, the discussion highlights that analytical plurality—comprising existence and quiddity—can still exist. Regarding the conception of divine simplicity as pure actuality, the article argues that this concept is acceptable only concerning the attributes of the divine essence. A third interpretation posits that God's attributes are identical to His essence. If this interpretation means that God's attributes do not contribute to multiplicity within the divine essence, then it could also apply to humans and is not exclusive to God. However, if it implies a complete semantic and ontological identity between God and His attributes, this interpretation would be problematic. In conclusion, the article asserts that the concept of divine simplicity is valid in certain senses but not in others.

Keywords

Divine simplicity, medieval philosophers, divine attributes; sovereignty of God.

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Introduction

When the term "simple" is attributed to contingent entities, it typically implies that they occupy a lower position in the hierarchy of existence compared to more intricate entities. For instance, an atom is considered simple when juxtaposed with a molecule, a brief melody compared to a symphony, or a child compared to an adult. Moreover, the term "simple" can carry a derogatory connotation, as seen when describing an adult as "simple-minded" or a "simpleton," suggesting a deficiency in the complexity and sophistication expected of a mature individual.

In theology, however, the concept of divine simplicity takes on a distinct significance. It denotes the rejection of any form of multiplicity within the essence of God. Simplicity, in its theological sense, means possessing no composition. If God were not simple, He would possess parts upon which He would depend; This dependence would contradict His aseity and sovereignty. God, thus, has a simple nature, devoid of parts or composition.

Many medieval Christian and Islamic philosophers and theologians considered God's nature simple. The most prominent proponents of divine simplicity include Augustine (354-430) Avicenna (980-1037) Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Mullā Ṣadrā (1571-1635). In contrast, some contemporary philosophers, such as Daniel Bennett (1969), Alvin Plantinga (1980), and Thomas Morris (1991) have sought to reject this quality, arguing that divine simplicity has unreasonable consequences. While these philosophers concede that God must not be composed of material or spatial parts, they deny the broader doctrine of divine simplicity (Plantinga, 1980, pp. 38-39).

In recent decades, the doctrine of divine simplicity has been the subject of vigorous debate within analytic philosophy of religion. A review of this contemporary literature reveals a spectrum of positions. Some philosophers have offered robust critiques of the traditional doctrine. For instance, William Hasker (2016) argues that the strong version of divine simplicity, as attributed to Augustine and Aquinas, is fundamentally mistaken, contending that it involves category mistakes, conflicts with God's knowledge of contingent truths, and undermines divine personhood. Conversely, numerous scholars have defended divine simplicity against such critiques. Brian Leftow (2006) offers a defense of the Augustinian doctrine by situating it within its original metaphysical framework regarding the nature of attributes, arguing that two of the three standard problems dissolve upon a proper understanding. Christopher Hughes (2018) carefully examines Aquinas's formulation and its implications, assessing the coherence of the doctrine while also contributing a structurally significant approach to rendering the identity of the divine attributes conceivable. More recent

defenses, such as that by Greeley (2019), directly respond to philosophical objections in an effort to rehabilitate the traditional view.

I believe that many articles written in recent decades regarding divine simplicity have attempted to interpret the concept using modern philosophical frameworks, which has sometimes led to problems. Some interpretations have either accepted or criticized this attribute without directly referencing the classical texts of medieval philosophy.

This article aims to scrutinize the concept of divine simplicity by demonstrating that it can be understood in several distinct senses. As will be explained, the first meaning entails the negation of plurality in the divine essence. The position ultimately defended here is that this meaning cannot be fully accepted. Although God possesses no material components, it remains possible that He includes analytical components. The second meaning asserts that God has no potentiality. This understanding will be affirmed with respect to the attributes of essence, though not in relation to the attributes of action. The third meaning holds that God's attributes are identical to His essence. I will argue that this claim is acceptable only in terms of ontological identity; however, this particular interpretation of simplicity is not unique to God and may also be attributed to human beings.

By analyzing these distinct meanings, this article seeks to address and refute several major objections raised by contemporary analytic philosophers concerning divine simplicity.

Explanation of Divine Simplicity

Divine simplicity indicates, at least, three distinct meanings:

Denying any Kind of Multiplicity in the Divine Essence: Divine simplicity means that God has no multiplicity within His essence. Avicenna (980–1037) argues that if God were composed of parts, His composed existence would depend on those parts, and the parts would have hierarchic priority over Him. However, it is impossible for a necessary being to be in need of parts that have preceded him (Avicenna, 1996, p. 100). All divine attributes exist in His entity without multiplicity. Furthermore, when God creates someone at a particular time, His relation to him is contingent and temporal; Nevertheless, this relation and the act of creation are external to the divine existence. The divine entity has no multiplicity, even though His relation to creation is contingent and temporal (Avicenna, 1983b, pp. 362-370).

Negating multiplicity in God, according to the theory of divine simplicity, necessitates that the quiddity (nature) of God is identical with

His existence. However, it must be noted that the unity of existence and quiddity in God had a particular parlance in medieval philosophy. In this context, quiddity is fundamentally abstracted from the limitations of finite existents and it is a conceptual frame that corresponds to finite existents (contingents); since God's existence is free from any sort of limitation, He possesses no quiddity (Avicenna, 1996, p. 273; Yazdi, 1999, pp. 525-526; Sabzevārī, 1981, pp. 465-466).

Likewise, the absolute simplicity of God entails that He lacks the composition of quantitative parts, since He is not corporeal nor composed of matter and form; nor does His nature differ from His existence. Similarly, there is no composition of genus and differentia, nor of substance and accident. Therefore, God is in no way composite, but is altogether simple (Aquinas, ST, I, q. 3, a 7).

Thomas Aquinas presents two fundamental arguments for this understanding of divine simplicity:

First, every composite is posterior to its component parts and dependent upon them; as the first being, God cannot be dependent on parts.

Second, every composite has a cause, for distinct things cannot unite unless an external cause acts upon them. God, however, is uncaused (Aquinas, ST, I, q. 3, a 6-7).

Complete Actuality of God: The simplicity of God demands His pure actuality. For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, potentiality is prior in time to the actuality, nevertheless, actuality is prior to potentiality in an absolute sense; for whatever exists in potentiality can only be actualized by an already actualized entity. Because God is the first being, it is impossible for Him to possess potentiality (Aquinas, ST, I, q. 3, a 1)

Furthermore, divine simplicity requires that there is no accident in God. First, because a substance is compared to its accidents as potentiality to actuality as a substance is in a sense actualized by its accidents. But there can be no potentiality in God since, as explained above, the necessary being must have all things actually, not potentially. Second, because the essential is prior to the accidental. Whereas God is the absolute primal being, there can be nothing accidental in him. In addition, He cannot possess any essential accidents, because such accidents are caused by the constituent principles of a substance. Nothing in God can be caused, for He is the uncaused first cause. Hence, it follows that there are no accidents in God (Aquinas, ST, I, q. 3, a 6-7).

On this view, God is necessary in every respect, meaning that He

possesses no potentiality and is entirely actual. According to medieval philosophers, this absence of any possibility in God is precisely what constitutes His complete actuality (Avicenna, 1983b, pp. 56-61).

Identity of the Divine Essence¹ and Attributes: There are two main interpretations regarding the identity of God's essence and attributes. The first interpretation, advocated by Avicenna, holds that all divine attributes are semantically and ontologically identical (Avicenna, 1984, p. 21). The second interpretation suggests that the attributes of God are semantically distinct but ontologically identical. According to this more widely accepted view, God possesses several attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence. These concepts are not synonymous; therefore, they must represent distinct concepts. The Muslim philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā, alluded to this point. He mentioned that while God has many attributes, they all inhere within His simple entity (Sadra, 1981, p. 144). He asserts that divine simplicity does not necessitate God having only one attribute or property², but rather, He possesses multiple attributes (Sadra, 1981, p. 145).

In the following sections, these three meanings will be analyzed. Based on this analysis, I will respond to the criticisms raised by several contemporary philosophers.

Denying Multiplicity in the Divine Essence

The negation of multiplicity in God can be defined in various ways. If negating composition and multiplicity means that God does not have any material components, this understanding of God's simplicity is acceptable, because God does not have a physical existence. Having a body indicates a limitation of existence, and it is impossible for God to be constrained by material components. Therefore, there is no doubt regarding God's immateriality. Indeed, opponents of divine simplicity do not deny this aspect of the doctrine. Defenders of God's simplicity, however, intend a broader meaning. They assert that God does not have the analytical components of existence and quiddity (nature). Generally, every contingent

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1. It should be noted that in Islamic philosophy, the word 'essence' often refers to God's being and existence, rather than to God's quiddity and whatness.
 2. It must be noted that contemporary analytic philosophers, like Plantinga, sometimes use the term "properties" instead of "attributes" of God. In this article, they may have the same meaning and be used interchangeably, but the important point is that, as will be explained, mediaeval philosophers never meant that, in contrast to contemporary analytic philosophers, the properties are abstracted, but that they are concrete, though they do not exist separately from the essence of God.

entity has two dimensions: existence and quiddity. Although they do not exist as separate components in external reality, an external object is intellectually analyzed into these two facets. The dimension of existence refers to the being of the object, while the dimension of quiddity refers to its specific nature.

This interpretation of divine simplicity is problematic because, from an intellectual standpoint, anything can be considered as having these two analytical components. Thus, God can also be understood as having two analytical components: one dimension referring to His existence and the other to His quiddity, with God's nature comprising God's perfect attributes. Accordingly, God possesses a quiddity like any other entity, and this quiddity is not unknown to us. Rather, divine attributes such as knowledge, power, and eternity can be seen as constituting God's quiddity. Although His nature is not fully comprehensible to us, we can consider God's perfect attributes as constituting His quiddity.

This argument can be formulated as a simple syllogism:

Premise 1: Intellectually, quiddity is a necessary correlate of any existent. Insofar as a being is distinct from others, it possesses a quiddity that defines "what it is." The very intelligibility of a being requires that it have a determinate nature that distinguishes it from other beings.

Premise 2: God exists as a distinct being, conceived by philosophers and theologians as possessing specific attributes that distinguish Him from all other beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, God necessarily possesses a quiddity. This divine quiddity is constituted by the perfect attributes traditionally ascribed to Him—such as knowledge, power, and eternity—which collectively define "what God is" and distinguish Him from contingent beings.

On this basis, the thesis denying divine quiddity seems to have some internal inconsistency. This is because having quiddity is a requirement for every existence. It seems meaningless and unreasonable for something to exist without having a quiddity.

The medieval philosophical denial of divine quiddity rested upon the false presumption that quiddity is abstracted from the limitations of beings. Given God's absolute limitlessness, medieval philosophers concluded that God has no quiddity. However, this assumption is incorrect because

quiddity is not necessarily abstracted from the limitations of finite entities; rather, quiddity refers to what an entity is. Every entity comprises two analytical components: existence and quiddity. God, like any other existent, possesses a quiddity, and this does not imply limitation for God.

As previously noted, the argument given by medieval philosophers to deny the quiddity of God is that if God has parts, He becomes dependent on His parts, and this dependence is in conflict with God's aseity and sovereignty. The response to this argument is that the need for parts is inconsistent with God's aseity and sovereignty only if God has material parts and requires them. However, the analytical concepts of quiddity and existence refer to a single being. Therefore, the need of God for other beings does not arise in analytical parts, since the existence and quiddity of God do not create an ontological duality of beings.

Therefore, while divine simplicity can be affirmed as the negation of material parts, the presence of analytical multiplicity poses no philosophical difficulty.

Complete Actuality of God

God's simplicity necessitates the complete negation of potentiality within divine essence. Whereas an imperfect or corporeal being has the potentiality to actualize further perfections, God's absolute perfection necessitates that all His perfections *actually* exist, and there remains no potentiality for any new event to occur within the divine being.

It is crucial to note that even though God has no potentiality, divine actions relate to the realm of potentiality. Material phenomena possess temporal and spatial limits and conditions, which influence the relations that are taken to hold between them and God. Consequently, the actions which are dependent on them are in one sense conditioned by time and space, as they are potential to various events. For example, it can be said that God created existent 'X' at time 'T' and location 'Y'.

The theory of divine simplicity as complete actuality is philosophically acceptable and does not face any problem. However, some contemporary analytical philosophers have raised concerns about it, which all seem answerable. Alvin Plantinga raises two primary challenges to this version of God's simplicity:

Plantinga argues that the theory of divine simplicity is paradoxical and plainly false. One property God has is *being such that Adam sinned*; this is an accidental property of God. Even if having created Adam isn't a

property, it is at any rate something that characterizes God, such that if this characterization did not take place, it would have resulted in God being something completely different. It appears patently implausible to maintain that the proposition *God created Adam* characterizes Adam but not God or says something about the former but not the latter. If I know that God created Adam, then I know something about God as well as Adam; I know that He has the attribute or characteristic of having created Adam. Whether we call this characteristic a 'property' or not is really of no consequence; if it isn't a property, it is at any rate very much like a property. And among God's characteristics, we find some that He could not have lacked and some (having created Adam, e. g.) that He could have. We need not call this a composition of essence and accident, but the distinction remains: some of God's characteristics characterize him in every possible world and some do not. And if there is something objectionable, from the point of view of the sovereignty-aseity intuition, in God's having both essential and accidental properties, there will be something equally objectionable in His having two kinds of characteristics: those He couldn't have lacked and those He could have. Thus he must have potentiality regarding some characteristics (Plantinga, 1980, pp. 40-44). Likewise, divine simplicity requires that all properties of God must be necessary, as His existence is, but there are several cases showing the contingency of divine attributes. It is only contingently true of God that He used His power to create our world; He could have created another universe instead, or, perhaps, He could have refrained from creating any physical realm at all. It is only contingently, not necessarily, true of God that He called Abraham out of Ur, spoke through Moses, or sent the prophets He chose (Morris, 1991, p. 117).

Among divine properties, He has not yet acquired some, but could potentially acquire them. No doubt He hasn't yet created all the persons He will create; He will create persons distinct from all those that have so far existed. If so, there is at least one individual essence, 'E', that God does not know, but will have the characteristic of causing 'E' to be instantiated. If so, He is in potentiality with respect to that characteristic (Plantinga, 1980, p. 44).

Plantinga indicates that advocates of divine simplicity, like Aquinas, might hold that God is not in time at all; then presumably it is not correct to say that He has not yet caused 'E' to be exemplified, but will do so at some future time. Plantinga, in response to Aquinas, denies divine timelessness, holding that though God's life has endless (and beginningless) duration, He is within time. God spoke to Abraham and did so, naturally enough, during the latter's life time. God created Adam and Eve and did so well before He created, say, Bertrand Russell. God led the children of Israel out of Egypt; He did so after He created Abraham and

before He spoke to Samuel. On the face of it, then, God acts in time, acts at various times, and has done some things before He did others (Plantinga, 1980, pp. 45-46).

The objections raised by Plantinga can be answered by employing a distinction prevalent in Islamic theology: the division between two kinds of attributes: *attributes of essence* and *attributes of action*. Both sorts of attributes relate to God, but the difference is that attributes of essence are those belonging to God, regardless of creation. For instance, the omniscience or omnipotence of God has always existed, regardless of the existence of other creatures. In contrast, attributes of act are related to, and are dependent on, the actions of God in relation to creation. For example, though we call God *creator*, this attribute has not always existed, but rather we have ascribed it to God since the beginning of His creation. These attributes of God are attributes of divine actions, and thus are temporal and may be limited (al-Saduq, 1993, p. 27, Al-Mufid, 1992, p. 42).

The chief differences between the attributes of essence and those of action are as follows:

- A: Attributes of action may be temporal and accidental. For example, divine power, as an attribute of essence, is eternal and actual, and thus God has always been *omnipotent*, but the act of creation, as an attribute of action, might be temporal and accidental. Therefore, God is designated as the *creator* in relation to a particular time when the action was performed.
- B: Attributes of essence are abstracted from God's essence, but attributes of actions are abstracted from God's acts.
- C: Attributes of essence are essential to God. Therefore, it is impossible for God to lack omnipotence or omniscience. But attributes of action are contingent. So, God may create at one time and act differently at another. Power, for instance, is an essential attribute and therefore, is necessary and eternal; however, the specific exercise of that power in creation is not necessary.
- D: The attributes of act are not *per se* the sign of perfection of God. However, they can be considered a perfection of God *only* in terms of returning to the attributes of essence. For instance, creating *per se*, as an attribute of action, does not show the perfection of God, but the power to create or the knowledge of creation, as the attributes of essence, display the perfection of God. The result is that since attributes of essence are *per se* the sign of perfection, God must have

them eternally, but since the attributes of action are not *per se* the sign of perfection, God may lack them sometimes. For example, consider these two attributes of God: "*reviver of people from death*" and "*perfectly able to revive*". The difference is that God may not always be actively reviving the dead, while the ability to do so is His inseparable, eternal characteristic (Shobbar, 2003, pp. 65-66).

In light of this distinction, I can respond to Plantinga by asserting that God possesses complete actuality regarding all perfections within the divine essence, and has no potentiality in this respect. However, God can have the potential to accept new attributes in relation to the attributes of action, as these do not represent perfection in the divine essence. Thus, distinguishing between attributes of essence and attributes of action allows us to assert that God has complete actuality in the attributes of essence, but regarding the attributes of action, He has potentiality. This meaning of potentiality in divine action does not face any philosophical problem.

The attributes of essence of God are necessary and completely actual, while the attributes of action are temporal and contingent, permitting potentiality. For example, divine omnipotence is a necessary attribute, representing the perfection of God, but His act of creating something (exercising the power) is an attribute of action; it does not indicate a perfection in God, and is therefore temporal and contingent.

Although contemporary analytic philosophers do not employ the distinction between the attributes of essence and the attributes of action, this classical division within Islamic theology can help us review Plantinga's view more carefully. His view regarding potentiality in God is acceptable only when considered in relation to the attributes of action. Properties capable of being realized in God concerning His acts are not actual. However, in relation to the attributes of essence—which indicate the perfection of the divine nature—God is pure actuality. Fundamentally, the existence of potentiality with respect to the attributes of essence would conflict with divine perfections.

A related objection is raised by Thomas Morris. He argues that it is a contingent fact that, say, I am garbed in a striped shirt. And God knows this fact. He thus has a belief or is in a specific state of knowledge, which is contingent. He has the property of being in this cognitive state contingently, since its status must mirror the contingent status of the fact known. God necessarily is a knower. God contingently has the knowledge that I have on a striped shirt. Thus, there is both necessity and contingency with respect to God. And there seems to be no other good way to capture this truth than to say that God has both necessary (essential) and contingent properties.

But if that is so, it contradicts the theory of divine simplicity, which holds that God has only necessary properties that are identical with the divine essence (Morris, 1991, p. 117).

This argument appears deficient. While the relationship between God's necessary knowledge and human free actions is a complex issue that requires detailed study, we can briefly address it in relation to divine simplicity. This objection rests upon a conflation of the *knowledge of a contingent fact* with *contingent knowledge*. God knows all facts, including contingent and necessary ones, but it does not follow that God's knowledge is both necessary and contingent. God knows necessarily that I will, by my own free will, contingently wear a striped shirt. There are many events in the world which are contingent. The *object of knowledge* might be contingent, while *the very knowledge* is necessary. When we say that the knowledge of God is necessary, it means His knowledge could not be otherwise. The object of divine knowledge might be contingent, but the very knowledge of God concerning that reality is necessarily true. There are indeed two things: the *object of divine knowledge* and *the divine knowledge*. The key point to better understand this, is to comprehend that the knowledge of God could be necessary, while the object of His knowledge is contingent. In the above example, I have free will to wear a striped shirt; this wearing is contingent for me, say, I can wear something else, but God knows necessarily what I will do with free will; wearing a striped shirt is a contingent action for me, but God can know necessarily whatever I willingly choose.

Identity of the Essence of God with His Attributes

The identity of God's essence with His attributes is another aspect of divine simplicity emphasized by medieval philosophers. This understanding can be interpreted in several ways, some of which are acceptable. They are as follows:

Human attributes are contingent, whereas God's attributes are necessary. Since the essence of God is necessary and the attributes of God are identical to His essence, the attributes must also be necessary (Sadra, 1981, V6, pp. 146-147).

From the preceding analysis, it becomes evident that this viewpoint is acceptable only concerning attributes of essence. For instance, human knowledge is contingent because it is not identical with one's essence and must be acquired. However, God's knowledge, being identical with His

essence, is necessary and does not require acquisition. In this interpretation, the identity of God's essence with His attributes signifies that these attributes are eternally present in the divine essence and are necessary. Conversely, in the case of humans, these attributes do not exist eternally, and individuals must acquire them.

A second interpretation, accepted by philosophers such as Avicenna, posits that God's attributes are semantically and ontologically identical. Avicenna acknowledges that attributes like knowledge, life, and power generally have distinct meanings. However, he maintains that the transcendence of God demands a higher degree of simplicity, such that when these attributes are ascribed to God, not only are they ontologically identical with the divine essence, but their meanings also become identical with one another. In his view, any distinction in the meaning of attributes ascribed to God would introduce composition into the divine nature—a composition that must be negated, given that God is absolutely simple (Avicenna, 1984, p. 21).

The difficulty with this interpretation is evident: the meanings we apprehend from each divine attribute remain distinct from one another. Just as the ordinary meanings of attributes like knowledge, power, and life are conceptually distinct, so too do they remain distinct when predicated of God. This view thus conflates two different realms: the concepts of the divine attributes, which are necessarily multiple and differentiated in our understanding, and their referent, which is simple and unified.

A third interpretation suggests that God's attributes are externally the same and are multiple only in a mental and subjective sense.

This interpretation is inadequate because mental concepts indicate external existence: thus, God's attributes cannot be mere mental concepts detached from His ontological existence.

A fourth interpretation posits that although God's essence is ontologically singular, God can be considered from different perspectives, allowing for the attribution of multiple attributes. According to this view, God does not possess any ontological composition, but His singular being can be perceived from various aspects and perspectives, allowing for the attribution of many attributes. Mullā Ṣadrā, acknowledging this account, explicitly states that attributes are ontologically identical but semantically distinct (Ṣadrā, 1981, pp. 144-145).

This interpretation of divine simplicity is acceptable. However, it is worth noting that this notion is not exclusive to God, as it can be meaningfully applied to other beings as well. For instance, characterizing a human being by multiple attributes simultaneously does not entail

ontological multiplicity within their existence. Rather, the singular reality of a human existent serves as the basis for abstracting various attributes.

Consider, a human being who is both knowledgeable and powerful. The attribute of "knowledge" refers to a particular person when considered in relation to cognition and intellectual apprehension. The attribute of "power" refers to that very same being when considered in relation to agency and the capacity to effect change. Neither attribute introduces an additional existential component into the human reality. The person remains one and the same existent, despite being describable by multiple predicates.

Similarly, when we describe a person as "compassionate" and "just," we do not posit two distinct ontological components within them. Compassion and justice are not separate entities added to the human substance; rather, they represent different ways of understanding and describing the same unified reality from distinct relational perspectives—one pertaining to mercifulness, the other to fair judgment.

This illustrates that the principle of ascribing multiple predicates to a single subject—without undermining its ontological unity—holds true for both God and creatures. In both cases, multiplicity pertains to different aspects of one being. A single existent can have various aspects and thus serve as the ground for diverse conceptual abstractions without thereby becoming multiple in its being.

Hence, there is no difference between God and human beings: both can be described by diverse attributes while remaining ontologically simple. The multiplicity of attributes does not generate ontological plurality in either case. The unity of the subject—whether divine or human—remains intact beneath the diversity of its descriptions.

In conclusion, among the four interpretations discussed, the first and fourth are acceptable. However, the fourth interpretation is not specific to God, whereas the first is exclusive to Him.

Despite the reasonableness of divine simplicity in some senses, some analytical philosophers have raised objections to divine simplicity that cannot be accepted. Daniel Bennett alleges that if God were identical with His attributes, then the properties He possesses would be identical to one another. Thus, if wisdom, justice, and mercy are different properties, then God can't have more than one of them (Bennett, 1969, p. 8). Building on this hypothesis, Alvin Plantinga, and those who advocated his ideas, provided two main reasons to reject divine simplicity. They claimed that:

If God is identical with each of His properties, then each of His properties is identical with all of His properties, so that God has

but one property. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; He has both power and mercifulness for example, neither of which is identical with the other (Plantinga, 1980, pp. 23-29, Gale, 1991, pp. 23-29).

If God is identical with each of His properties, then, since each of His properties is a property, He is a property—a self-exemplifying property. Accordingly, God has just one property: Himself. This view is subject to a difficulty both obvious and overwhelming. No property could have created the world; no property could be omniscient, or, indeed, know anything at all. If God is a property, then He is not a person but a mere abstract object; He has no knowledge, awareness, power, love or life (Plantinga, 1980, p. 47, Craig, 2016, p. 64). Divine simplicity entails that God is not a substance and accordingly is not a personal agent (Craig, 2017, p. 146).

Both criticisms can be addressed according to the fourth meaning that was explained. It is necessary here to understand that one simple existence could be seen from different perspectives, thereby serving as the foundation for the abstraction of different attributes. Some medieval philosophers maintained that, all divine attributes are ontologically in one simple being, though they can be viewed from different perspectives, and thus be the source of different attributes. Therefore, divine simplicity does not entail that God is a property, but rather that He is a substance¹ with various properties that are all united in His being.

Having noted the above explanation, I can give the following reply to Plantinga. In the first objection, he concludes that the identity of God and His attributes makes all divine attributes one property. The argument seems to be flawed, since the different attributes of God are ontologically united with His substance in one simple being, we can look at Him from different perspectives and abstract different and distinct attributes from Him. For example, the power of God is distinct from His knowledge: God has diverse attributes, but all of these attributes are ontologically actualized in one simple being.

Similarly, we can reject the second objection. The identity of God and His attributes does not lead to the conclusion that God is a property. Instead, it means that God is a person possessing different attributes, but these attributes, ontologically, inhere in the personal existence of God. God is not a mere property, but rather, a simple substance with various attributes

1. Medieval philosophers usually do not attribute "substance" to God because they maintain that "substance" is specific to quiddities and God is an existence beyond quiddities. But what I mean by "substance" in this article is its general meaning in contemporary philosophy, which is opposed to "property".

that are all united ontologically with the being of God.

Another point to note is that by reading some of the medieval philosophical texts, it becomes clear that they did not consider attributes of God to be abstract objects. Rather, they viewed them as a kind of concrete (albeit non-separate) existent. According to an Aristotelian view – widely accepted by medieval Christian and Muslim philosophers – properties are real; even though they do not exist separately, they are predicable of entified things and have external characterization. Properties, though real, are not transcendent but immanent, that is, they do not exist apart from their particular instances, but within them. Given this view, if a concrete object such as a tree exists, in time and space, all its properties also exist within that object in time and space. Properties exist wherever and whenever their particular instances are (Galluzzo, 2015, pp. 85-86, Francesco Orilia, 2020). However, even though God is beyond time and space, according to divine simplicity, it can be said that just as God has a concrete being, so too do His attributes, in the sense that they exist immanently (non-separately) within the very being of God.

The concept of ‘essence’ in medieval philosophy must also be carefully considered. In this tradition, the essence of God is never an abstract concept; rather, it indicates the very concrete existence of God that is united with His attributes (Avicenna, 1983a, pp. 183-187). Accordingly, it becomes clear that neither the divine essence, nor even His attributes are abstract concepts, rather they all point to the simple, concrete, and personal being of God.

Conclusion

One of the contested divine attributes defended by medieval philosophers is that of divine simplicity. Medieval thinkers proposed three distinct meanings for this attribute, some of which are endorsed in this article while others are rejected. These meanings are as follows:

- A. The first interpretation of divine simplicity posits that there is no composition in the divine essence.

In this article, it has been argued that if this interpretation is intended to negate the composition of analytical components—namely, existence and quiddity—then it cannot be accepted. However, if it is meant to deny material components, the interpretation is plausible, and even critics of divine simplicity do not reject it. This is because the disagreement between proponents and opponents concerns analytical composition, and the present

article has adopted the position of the critics in this regard.

B. The second interpretation is that God is pure actuality and devoid of potentiality.

It has been explained that God's pure actuality is acceptable concerning the attributes of essence. However, with respect to the attributes of action, God does possess potentiality. Nonetheless, this potentiality does not pose a philosophical difficulty, since the attributes of action do not themselves signify perfection in God. Hence, a qualified acceptance of the proponents' view regarding this interpretation of divine simplicity can be maintained.

C. The third interpretation asserts that God's attributes are identical with His essence.

The identity of God's attributes with His essence is acceptable if it means that the attributes of essence are necessary. Likewise, if it is taken to mean that the attributes do not bring about ontological multiplicity in the divine being, this claim is also acceptable. However, this latter sense also applies to other beings, such as humans, for whom the multiplicity of attributes likewise does not result in ontological plurality. Therefore, simplicity understood as necessity is a distinctive attribute of God, whereas simplicity understood as ontological identity is not exclusive to God but is a feature shared by human beings.

▣ **Conflict of Interest**

▣ The author declares no competing interests.

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