DIVINE SIMPLICITY

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Abstract. This paper examines a variety of approaches in order to make sense of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Discussing the implications of traditional and contemporary philosophical concepts of divine simplicity, the author argues for taking the divine nature as a stupendous substance (in a Hegelian sense) to serve as the one and only truthmaker of statements regarding God, while we can resolve the predication problem which is caused by the idea that, as implied by divine simplicity, God is identical to his attributes if we conceive of the divine nature as an equivalent to Platonic forms.

I. INDICATION OF PROBLEMS

There is a tendency in contemporary systematic theology, but also in those areas of philosophy of religion dealing with Christian faith and its consistency, to regard divine simplicity as an extremely difficult and even troublesome divine attribute.[1] It is not only relatively hard to depict it in an adequate manner — for it seems to carry the whiff of metaphysics in a pejorative sense of the word — but it seems also relatively complicated to make sense of it within the framework of contemporary metaphysics.

I.1. Burdens and Benefits

From the very beginning, a purely philosophical examination reveals the difficulties, which one encounters as soon as she is ready to accept simplicity as a divine attribute. For by divine simplicity could (alternatively or altogether) be meant:[2]

1. that God has no parts (neither temporal nor spatial)

2. that there is in principle no composition in God — neither a composition of matter and form nor of essence and existence.

3. that there is no change of any kind for God, so that he is neither able to have accidental attributes nor 'true' relations, which would connect him with a non-necessary essence.

4. that God does not only have attributes, but also is (identical to) his attributes.

The rationale behind these assumptions consists, as James Dolezal has argued, in excluding any kind of dependency from God, since for traditional metaphysics being composite is equivalent to being onto-

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1   For an overview on the state of the discussion cf. Siobhan Nash-Marshall, "Properties, Conflation, and Attribution: The Monologion and Divine Simplicity", *The Saint Anselm Journal* 4, no. 2 (2007); for an analysis and defense cf. Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity", *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996); Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity", *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985). An excellent overview of contemporary philosophical and theological discussions of divine simplicity can be found in James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Pickwick Publications, 2011), 11–30. For another very instructive overview of theological positions coping with the notion of divine simplicity see Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Fortress Press, 2017), chap. 1.

2   Cf. Eleonore Stump, "Simplicity", in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Philip L. Quinn (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 250. Cf. partly also Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2003), 96.

logically dependent, since any composite object has to rely on some outer or greater source or principle to be sustained in composition.[3] But, as Eleonore Stump has pointed out, each of these implications of divine simplicity is followed by an abundance of consequential problems.[4] The consequences of the first implication are yet rather harmless insofar as they lead to constituents of classic theism, which are highly debated, but which could not easily be evaluated as counterintuitive or as charged with contradictions without further argumentation. In particular, they lead to the traditional claims of divine eternity and omnipresence. The second implication, however, is much more burdensome, because it seems to rule out any kind of composition within God. It is not surprising that finite ontological principles do not have any significance for God, since he is just not part of their area of application. However, at first glance, ruling out every kind of composition would keep away any kind of complexity from God — including the complexity of mental reflections, which are differentiated in their content and which, therefore, are a confirmation of vitality and activity. As soon as God's life is understood as a together and mutual relation of three persons — as some contemporary authors do — then the attribute of divine simplicity seems to be straightaway in conflict with some basic claims of the Christian Credo. Additionally, the third implication is by no means a trifling matter, as also indicated by Eleonore Stump. For on the basis of this implication, God's free act of creation as well as his free sovereignty over nature could become questioned. Furthermore, the impassibility of God, which was so much incriminated by the theology of the late twentieth century, is also indicated in the third implication: For it seems that a God, who is not able to entertain real, robust relations to his creation, cannot be affected or touched by events within this creation.[5] The fourth implication leads to a prima facie strange consequence, which has been articulated in a very precise way by Alvin Plantinga:[6] If it is true that God does not only possess his attributes, but is identical with them, then all divine attributes are not only mutually identical with each other, but God also is only an attribute. If Plantinga were right, this would be a very unwelcome consequence for the notion of God as a personal being.

But isn't there anything worth keeping in the doctrine of divine simplicity? Among others William Vallicella has powerfully defended the consistency of the doctrine and has underlined some of its benefits:

> If true, the simplicity doctrine promises the theist considerable advantages: a possible way around the Euthyphro Paradox, an explanation of why God is a necessary being, and a premise for a short non-modal ontological argument.[7]

The idea that the doctrine of divine simplicity forces us to identify God with his very own nature especially helps us to arrive at these consequences: Once we can identify God with his own goodness, the logical and ontological gap, which is required for the Euthyphro problem, won't even open up. Additionally, this very notion can help us to block some of the premises required for theistic activism or other approaches that seek to find a viable solution for the problem of God's relation to abstract entities. Based on the doctrine of simplicity this problem can be modelled on the relation God has to his very own nature, which — if it is a relation of identity — won't be subject to the divine will or God's creative power. Equally, divine aseity is protected and kept intact at the highest level — thanks to divine simplicity — because the notion of God being identical to his nature and, thus, being identical to his attributes prevents us from assuming that there might exist properties (in any Platonic kind of way) logically and ontologically before

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3   Cf. Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 31–34.

4   Cf. Stump, "Simplicity", 250–52.

5   Cf. Stump, *Aquinas*, 100–115, 122–127; also cf. William Hasker, "Simplicity and Freedom: A Response to Stump and Kretzmann", *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1986). For the general and supervening topic cf. Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (OUP, 2012).

6   Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Marquette Univ. Press, 1980), 47. For a discussion cf. Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?", *Noûs* 24, no. 4 (1990).

7   William F. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (1992): 508.

or apart from God.[8] Rather, these attributes are a given — given with the existence of God as such. Insofar as the doctrine of divine simplicity excludes any kind of composition in God we must not regard God as a compound of essence and existence.[9] For being a compound of that sort is typical for finite beings, which may have a describable nature but nevertheless lack existence. But if existence is essence in God we cannot conceive of God as having a nature but, nevertheless, lacking existence.[10] On this very basis we can — as Vallicella rightly pointed out — build an ontological argument as well as a confirmation of divine necessity.

Of course, hinting at divine necessity leaves us with a follow-up question: i.e. the connection between God's necessity and the necessity of all his attributes, as indicated in the third implication above. This very specific problem cannot be sufficiently examined in this paper. For now, I will just shortly indicate two possible ways to deal with these difficulties: Eleonore Stump interprets the necessity of divine attributes as *temporal essentiality*, referring to Thomas Aquinas: At all points of time in the actual world, God possesses the properties *F*, *G*, *H*. However, this does not imply that there are possible worlds, in which God could not have other properties. Another way of interpreting the necessity of divine attributes could provide a slightly easier solution, because it preserves the common-sense notion of necessity (as that, which is true in all possible worlds). But this kind of necessity would only apply to the intrinsic attributes of God, but not to his relational attributes (if there are any), which are understood as concrete instances of divine dispositions that are necessary as dispositions, but whose concrete instances are not necessary as such.[11]

I.2. Simplicity as a Predication-Governing Rule?

Before we move on to a closer examination and assessment of the implications of divine simplicity mentioned above, the question has to be posed, what a *subsidiary* attribute — a term born out of a certain puzzlement — really is. This puzzlement becomes visible as soon as we try to avoid explaining the mentioned attribute directly and try to determine its content with the help of its implications, instead.

Let us suppose that if *x* has the attribute *S*, then a whole bunch of implications φ^*, φ^{**}, φ^{***}, φ^{****} follows from *x* having *S*, while we cannot rule out that maybe exactly the same implications follow from a wholly different attribute *x* may also have. So — to be more precise — from divine eternity at least follow the initially mentioned implications 1. and 3., and from divine necessity follow the implications 3. and 4. Additionally, from divine infinity follow 1., 2., and 4. in turn altogether, so that this very special attribute — if not equivalent to *divine simplicity* — would still be extremely helpful to shed some light on simplicity. And, indeed, some voices of tradition — especially Aquinas[12] and, even more so, John Duns Scotus — have put divine simplicity in a conceptual neighbourhood next to *divine infinity* and therefore claim that there is a close interconnection or a derivative relationship between both attributes. In the light of this it is a rather 'shaky' proposal, which has to be put on the table right at the beginning and which holds that divine simplicity is an attribute in its own right, because it is only with regard to divine simplicity that all four above-mentioned implications follow from it. Of course, divine simplicity remains strongly connected with attributes like infinity and eternity, from which some of the mentioned implica-

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8   Cf. William F. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford Univ., 2018), § 1.

9   Cf. Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 35–65. Dolezal underlines that within a Thomistic framework there is no composition of essence and existence, matter and form, act and potency, supposit and nature, genus and species, and substance and accident in God. The leading idea behind the multi-layered exclusion of composition is an emphasis on God's aseity and self-sufficiency.

10   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", § 1.

11   To this direction point some remarks in Brian Davies, "Simplicity", in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, ed. Ch. Taliaferro and Chad Meister (CUP, 2010).

12   Cf. Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 7 a. 1 resp.: 'Illud autem quod est maxime formale omnium, est ipsum esse… Cum igitur esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo, sed ipse sit suum esse subsistens, …; manifestum est quod ipse Deus sit infinitus et perfectus.' Infinity stems from a special connection between essence and existence in God; this is the very the reason, why in God the essence cannot have any limiting power. And that also rules out compositions of any kind; cf. Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 3 a. 4 resp.: „Sua igitur essentia est suum esse.'

tions follow also. But maybe we are not in a position to say that simplicity is the same as aseity, infinity, or eternity. If anything, there might be a relation of mutual entailment or equivalence.

Can we, if we pause our deliberation for a minute, say that — given the unclear content of divine simplicity — this very property is more like place-holder or a surrogate property (which would cause the notional puzzlement)? A closer analysis, nevertheless, reveals simplicity to be a filter of other attributes,[13] which allows a *predication of predicates* similar to the role of *divine perfection* (which is not an attribute next to other attributes, but a certain mode, by which other divine attributes can be understood or explained). As with divine perfection, divine simplicity would indicate the *mode of having* attributes — while perfection points at an axiological maximum, simplicity points at identity, apparently.

But this also raises the question, which kind of attribute *simplicitas* could be. If the attribute in question — as indicated above — could be seen as implementing a rule for the predication of predicates from a theology of language point of view, then a claim like 'God is simple' would be rather incomplete — we would have to think of it as 'God is *F* simply/in a simplicity-way' — or would be an abbreviation for a number of other phrases. For in a similar way, the sentence 'God is perfect' can also be treated as an abbreviation or incomplete expression — alluding at statements like 'God is perfectly *F*' etc. If the most basic attribute ascribable to God is 'existing' or 'being', the predication-governing role of both attributes can be spelled out like this: 'God is perfect being' etc. and (in analogy to that) 'God is simple (or simply) existing'.

If we reconstruct divine simplicity as a predication-governing attribute of some sort, comparing simplicity to regular attributes and wondering how simplicity messes with what we want to ascribe to God would be like barking up the wrong tree. Additionally, we can expect that the four initially mentioned implications will still be in place if we separate divine simplicity from the realm of regular attributes and promote it to the role of a predication-governing property. For if one is willing to combine simplicity with being or existing in the indicated way and therefore arrives at sentences like 'God is simply being' etc. on this basis, then the resurfacing threat of composition and necessity (i.e. what is excluded by implications 2. and 3.) will dissolve. Furthermore, as soon as the content of the 'being/existing simply' is qualified in more detail in terms of composition or necessity, then the result will get close to implications 1. and 4. So, is taking divine simplicity as a predication-governing attribute the best, if not the only way of making sense of it?

A comparable consideration can be found in James Dolezal's treatise of divine simplicity. What comes to mind is the question of why and how certain divine attributes are, indeed, related to divine simplicity. Dolezal rightfully points out that divine simplicity establishes a close web with divine aseity and absoluteness.[14] But does it do so in being the hidden ingredient of divine aseity, the meta-level master plan of divine aseity (as a predicate governing rule) or as a safety net to protect divine aseity by identifying the divine nature with whatever might turn up as a necessary and eternal abstract object competing with God's sovereignty. What we can say with some certitude is that the doctrine of divine simplicity is meant to *express* two interrelated aspects of a metaphysical doctrine of God:[15]

1) If anything, God is the ultimately standard of metaphysical constituents, for he is being in his richest and fullest form. So the identity-aspects entailed by the doctrine of divine simplicity are a means to express this very richness and fullness of God's ontological status. Instead of being a burden for conceiving the nature of God accurately they safeguard the necessary ontological distance between God and finite beings. In doing so they also safeguard the concept of God from trivialized understandings of divinity or what it means to be divine.

2) Whatever we predicate of God has to be done from the angle of God's being different from finite entities.[16] Thus, speaking of God as 'having' attributes is to a certain extent inadequate. It is part

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13   Cf. Thomas Schärtl, *Theo-Grammatik: Zur Logik der Rede vom trinitarischen Gott* (Pustet, 2003), 298–320.
14   Cf. Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 125–63.
15   Cf. Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 93–124.
16   Cf. David B. Hart, *The Experience of God* (Yale Univ. Press, 2013), part 1, chap. 1, § III; part 2, chap. 3, § II.

of God's richness of being what he is supposed to be *entirely*.[17] The doctrine of divine simplicity strengthens this notion of entirety while stressing that God's attribute (based on this very mode of entirety) are not mutually restricting each other — quite the opposite.

In a similar way David Bentley Hart underlines the relevance of the doctrine of divine simplicity as the most important way to express God's unique ontological status:

> If God is to be understood as the unconditioned source of all things, rather than merely some very powerful but still ontologically dependent being, then any denial of divine simplicity is equivalent to a denial of God's reality. This is obvious if one remembers what the argument form creaturely contingency to divine necessity implies. To be the first cause of the whole universal chain of per se causality, God must be wholly unconditioned in every sense. He cannot be composed of and so dependent upon severable constituents, physical or metaphysical, as then he would himself be conditional. … He also must possess no limitations of any kind, intrinsic or extrinsic, that would exclude anything real from him.[18]

I.3. Basic Alternatives in the Treatment of Divine Simplicity

There are three strategies to deal with divine simplicity — strategies, which I have already been pointing at, but had not sufficiently explained above: 1) Some philosophers and theologians suggest that the best we can do for the Christian doctrine of God would be to abandon divine simplicity as an intolerable hangover from past metaphysics. We could call this approach the *dismissive* view.[19] In general a dismissive view or strategy might be unavoidable, whenever it is important to save the consistency of the notion of God *and* when it turns out that a certain attribute puts a heavy burden on this consistency. Of course, if consistency can be saved by not throwing out the attribute in question further reasons become necessary for retaining a traditional, well-established divine predicate of God. So — as for instance William Vallicella has shown — if we can come up with a consistent reconstruction of divine simplicity (based, for instance, on the framework of classical metaphysics as well as a number of specific metaphysical principles) — the justification to place exactly the predicate of divine simplicity at disposal cannot merely be derived from a claim of inconsistency. A *further* reason for such a move could be what Nicholas Wolterstorff had underlined: 1) If we want to keep the doctrine of divine simplicity then we have to stick to its medieval or Neo-Platonic metaphysical presuppositions all the way through. 2) From a contemporary point of view we cannot stick to a medieval or Neo-Platonic metaphysics. 3) Thus, we cannot keep the doctrine of divine simplicity. The burden of proof lies with the first premise; but if William Vallicella is right, the doctrine of divine simplicity as well as its implications need an ontology, which uses tools other than properties being some sort of universals, having properties as some kind of property exemplification, and having a razor sharp distinction between properties and individuals.[20] These tools might, indeed, come under scrutiny from a contemporary perspective. In addition followers of a social doctrine of the trinity would point to the incompatibility of *divine simplicity* with the Trinitarian concept of God. However, the emphasis on the Trinity may lead to an argument in favour of a *dismissive* account only, if the social doctrine of the Trinity is already presupposed as the (only) correct interpretation of the Christian dogma of the Trinity.[21]

In contrast, a more *reconstructive* understanding of simplicity can be found in Christopher Hughes, whose primary resource is Thomas Aquinas. Using two combined lines of thinking, Hughes — in a first approach — tries to interpret divine simplicity as absolute causality with regard to the identity of existence

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17   Cf. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, chap. 6.

18   Hart, *The Experience of God*, part 2, chap. 3, § VII.

19   So e.g. in Wierenga's important publication on divine attributes, *divine simplicity* is not even mentioned, cf. Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An inquiry into divine attributes* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989). Furthermore, in Richard Swinburne's classic analysis of the most important attributes of God, no treatment of simplicity can be found, cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Clarendon Press, 1993).

20   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity" § 3.

21   An unambiguously clear vote in favour of a dismissive view can be found in William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (OUP, 2013), 36–39 Unsurprisingly Hasker argues for a social model of the trinity.

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and essence in God and derives from it the absolutely asymmetrical participation of the world in God.[22] This way Hughes shows how divine simplicity and divine aseity are strongly interconnected. Now for the problem of identifying the divine attributes with each other and with God, Hughes operates with specific tools — especially with *co-extensionality* or *supervenience.*[23] Vallicella takes the idea of co-extensionality one important step further: By undercutting the dualism of properties and individuals[24] and by using some sort of trope nominalism,[25] he is able to give a very precise reconstruction of what is meant by the identity of divine attributes and the identity of God with his attributes.

A third strategy of dealing with divine simplicity can be seen in — what I am inclined to call — *transformative* approaches. These approaches regard divine simplicity — as a matter of fact — as a place holder within the language of classic theism, while it has to be translated in something else under the contemporary conditions of a nowadays metaphysics. Still quite close to the classic discourses about *simplicitas* is Jeffrey Brower,[26] who particularly engages with St. Anselm and who grounds his reconstruction of the classic notion of divine simplicity in divine aseity. Brower's core intuition is intimately related to the idea that *tropes* are the best candidates to serve as truthmakers for our assertions regarding God's properties. In the end, these tropes are identical with God: For instance, God is just, because there is the one *divine justice*, which is God himself, etc. However, the question is, whether this new way of interpretation would have to admit that ultimately the divine nature serves as one, simple truthmaker eventually, on which all assertions about God's attributes, etc., depend.[27] In a comparable manner Alexander Pruss[28] and Graham Oppy[29] have proposed this way of understanding divine simplicity: For what is said about God, God himself (his nature respectively) necessarily and unequivocally is the only (minimal) truthmaker — so that truthmaking in this case is not intermediated by anything like universals, states of affairs, events, etc.

A significantly different, but still transformative account can be found in the writings of Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, who subordinate divine simplicity to the idea that God should primarily be seen as a substance, for which a connection with attributes that have to be considered as tropes would be necessary. We can say in their favour that in this transformational approach all initially mentioned implications of divine simplicity are still present 'behind the curtain': God being a self-sustaining substance says that he is superior to everyday property-ascription, individuation, and composition. However, the metaphysical connection of mutually necessitating tropes within the divine substance must not be regarded as the kind of composition that equals the relation between a part and the whole. Although in their view God is more of a complex entity and clearly does not share the characteristics of the Neo-Platonic One, simplicity is transformed into the necessity of an interconnection of certain tropes, while the identity of God with his attributes is, at least, mirrored in the ontological features of tropes qua tropes, which are seen as metaphysical hybrids that are above the difference between bearer and attribute.[30]

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22   Cf. Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 28, 50–59. The concept of co-extensionality has also been used in William E. Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability in God", in *The concept of God*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 256. Mann emphasizes that divine attributes are necessarily co-extensional and that necessarily co-extensional attributes are 'identical'. Whereas this first thesis seems reasonable and is explicated by him, his second thesis is not much developed and, therefore, needs further explanation. After all, Mann indicates that both theses are indebted to a perfect being theology, so that — for a first approach to the identity thesis — he reminds us that only the perfection of the attributes in God is identical which also says that they cannot plainly be identical underneath that level of perfection.

23   Cf. Hughes, *Simple God*, 60–87.

24   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", 512–16.

25   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", § 3.3.

26   Cf. Jeffrey E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (OUP, 2009).

27   Cf. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity", 115.

28   Cf. Alexander R. Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity", in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*: *Vol. 1*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 152–54.

29   Cf. Graham Oppy, *Describing Gods: An Investigation of Divine Attributes* (CUP, 2014), 96–98.

30   Cf. Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 59–74.

Without a doubt, the briefly sketched transformative strategies have the advantage of connecting several basic intuitions of the classic notion of divine simplicity with some basic insights stemming from contemporary ontological debates. These strategies are able to articulate their proposal within a framework that does not get too close to Plotinus' concept of the One. This is true for Brower's, Oppy's, and Pruss' truthmaker account as well as for the well-laid-out notion of substance in Hoffman and Rosenkrantz. However, these transformative accounts would gain in plausibility, if we were able to identify some elements in the traditional concept of *divine simplicity* — elements, which by themselves point towards the direction of a transformative interpretation. We will have to find out whether the analogy of God as being a perfectly self-transparent mind and consciousness might help us here.

Let us briefly summarize the positive interpretations we might arrive at, once we try not to dismiss the notion of divine simplicity but instead invoke a principle of charity in reconstruction or transforming the classic heritage. We have three options:

1. *Divine simplicity and co-extensionality*: The perfect attributes of God are co-extensional — analogous to different sets, which always and necessarily possess exactly one and the same element — God. The least that could be said in this case is that divine simplicity underlines the identity of what the divine attributes refer to while the different attributes may still have different meanings.[31]

2. *Simplicitas and truthmaker*: Any claim concerning (necessary) statements about God and his attributes are made true by one and the same truthmaker, i.e. God's unique nature, which has to be reconstructed metaphysically as a trope.

3. *Simplicitas and substance*: The doctrine of divine simplicity emphasizes that God's divinity has to be understood as an ordered configuration of tropes that share a common foundation by necessity — so that God's case of having attributes makes him distinct from and superior to any finite entity having attributes and so that this mode of being a substance keeps divine aseity fully intact.

Although I am very sympathetic with the reconstructive accounts of Hughes and Vallicella, the 'intra-mural' difficulties of reconciling divine simplicity with God's being Trinitarian seem to recommend a rather transformative account. If we take a step back and look at this above layout from the perspective of Trinitarian theorizing, we can easily identify truthmaking and substance as the bridge between divine simplicity and the Trinity: For what is said about each Trinitarian person is true by virtue of the divine substance. And each Trinitarian person is — at least in the Latin tradition — a 'subsistential' mode and 'stamping' (*Ausprägung*) of the divine substance.

II. SEEKING AN ADEQUATE RECONSTRUCTION

My guiding conviction will be that the classic authors have seen divine simplicity as something, which is an integral part of a metaphysical as well as of a Christian doctrine of God; i.e they did not regard their adherence to divine simplicity as a hindrance of, or in competition with, a Christian concept of God. In uncovering the conceptual motives, the following analysis is orientated at St. Anselm (and, partly, at Thomas Aquinas) — presupposing that they have possessed a *reasonable* and *consistent* concept of divine simplicity. Following the path of rather reconstructive efforts on this way, I will also plead for a gentle transformation of *divine simplicity* and for cautious interpretations of the consequences of the initially mentioned implications.

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31   Cf. for a clear elaboration of this point Stump, "Simplicity", 250–52. For a criticism of Stump's Fregean way of dealing with the variety of divine attributes see Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", 509 f.. Vallicella's point here is that Stump's (and Kretzmann's) use of Frege is, to a certain extent, *ad hoc* and does not do justice to the tradition, which clearly insists on an identity of attributes. In Vallicella's view we can, therefore, not just stop our reconstruction at a Fregean framework but have to do the metaphysical homework that really gets us to the identity-thesis eventually.

St. Anselm has developed the topic of divine simplicity primarily in his *Monologion*. It is illuminating to write down Anselm's key theses in order to be able to follow his understanding of *divine simplicity*:

1) The highest being (= God) is such that everything, which can be said about him or can be attributed to him, is *one and the same*.[32]

2) Although the perfection of the highest being appears (to us) as a conglomerate of various perfections, this *cannot* mean that the highest being is (literally) *constituted* by various perfections. This apparent variety is the result of nothing else but different names for one and the same.[33]

3) Finite entities are composed entities and have their perfection *not out of themselves/through themselves*. They owe their existence to those perfections, *which they are not in themselves/by themselves*. But this very dependence cannot be true for the highest being.[34]

4) If different (ontological) conditions apply for the highest being in contrast to finite beings, then the highest being has to be different from what is typical for finite beings: being composed. That means: The highest being does not simply have perfections in the way finite beings have perfections/are perfect: instead, the highest being must be (identical to) these perfections. Furthermore all these perfections are one and the same.[35]

5) Any perfection, which is ascribed to the highest being, is identical with every other perfection.[36] Hence, everything, which can be said about the highest being, actually is one or must be expressed in one single manner or is regarding one single thing only.[37]

6) Counter examples — contrary to what is typical of the highest being — are detectable in any claim regarding human beings. We say about a human being that she is a *material body*, that she is *rational* or *human*. But the predicates 'being material', 'being rational', 'being human' are not ascribed to the entities in question as one thing or concerning only one regard and perspective. And none of these predicates — if taken on their own and apart from each other — explains what a human being (essentially) is in a sufficient or perfect way.[38]

7) But this is exactly what is different compared to the characteristics of the highest being. It indeed *is* (identical to) that, which can truly be ascribed to it. And everything, which can be ascribed to it, is one and the same.[39]

8) What can be said about the highest being is not ascribed to it with regard some quantity or quality, but always regarding his essence. For any regard to quantity and quality would always

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32   Cf. St. Anselm, *Monologion* XVII. St. Anselm uses the paraphrase 'highest nature' (*summa natura*) in this context, whereas in *Monologion* XI he talks about the highest substance (*summa substantia*). If this is not just a variation in terms — with some inaccuracy taken into account by Anselm himself — one could rightfully suppose that the metaphysical characterization of God in St. Anselm's view entails God (or his nature) being an individual as well as a property or as an entity that is superior to the distinction between individuals and properties.

33   Cf. St. Anselm, *Monologion* XVII: 'Cum igitur illa natura nullo modo composita sit, et tamen omnimodo tot illa bona sit, necesse est ut illa omnia non plura, sed unum sint.'

34   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Omne enim compositum, ut subsistat, indiget iis ex quibus componitur, et illis debet quod est; quia quidquid est, per illa est, et illa quod sunt, per illud non sunt…'

35   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Idem igitur est quodlibet unum eorum, quod omnia sive simul sive singula.'

36   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Ut cum dicitur iustitia vel essentia, idem significat quod alia, vel omnia simul et singula.'

37   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Quemadmodum itaque unum est, quidquid essentialiter de summa substantia dicitur, ita ipsa uno modo, una consideratione est quidquid est essentialiter.'

38   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Cum enim aliquis homo dicatur et corpus et rationalis et homo, non uno modo vel condieratione haec tria dicitur. Sencundum aliquid enim est corpus, et secundum aliud rationalis, et singulum horum non est totum hoc quod est homo.'

39   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Illa vero summa essentia nullo modo sic est aliquid, ut illud idem secundum alium modum aut secundum aliam considerationem non sit; quia quidquid aliquo modo essentialiter est, hoc est totum quod ipsa.'

introduce a new element, which could lead to the suspicion that the highest being is constituted by or composed of something else.[40]

II.1. Identity of Attributes

Now it is easy to see how St. Anselm's theses 1) and 2), whose claims are restated in 5) and 7), do already lead into some difficulties: How and in what sense could we say that all the attributes, which we ascribe to God, are *one and the same*? How should we understand that God's (perfect) wisdoms is his (perfect) goodness, that his life is his justice, that his omnipotence is his omniscience, etc.? Again it must be underlined that the identity of attributes does not apply for the named attributes *per se*, but only for their unsurpassable maximality, and only this mode of having *F* unsurpassably maximally is applicable to God.[41] But what could the identity of attributes mean in this case? Using the tool of co-extensionality and some embellishments from possible-worlds-metaphysics, the following could be said:

(AID) Two attributes *F* and *G* are identical, if their conceptual contents B^F and B^G have exactly the same extension in every possible world.

Is the problem already solved, just because we can say that notions such as 'a perfectly wise being' and 'a perfectly good being' are co-extensional by necessity? Almost immediately we will encounter two difficulties here: On the one hand, notions like *being perfectly good* or *being perfectly wise* are derived from plain *goodness* and *wisdom* so to speak. Obviously, the non-insurpassable contents or concepts of the attributes in question aren't co-extensional, because there may be worlds in which a good being exists, but in which that being is not wise (or the other way round). Why don't such content-related distinctions apply for the unsurpassable maximality of these attributes as well — as differences maybe not in reference but in meaning (in a Fregean way of speaking) such that the addressee of these unsurpassably enhanced is the very same although the meaning of these attributes remains different all the way up? Otherwise — if we want to say more than just hinting at the sameness of the addressee — our superlative formulations would have to be understood in such a way that they do not only supply an enhancement — by criterially constricting the application-conditions of the maximized and enhanced attributes in question — but also introduce a change of meaning. But couldn't that — in a radical interpretation of what might go on here — invoke a situation in which we — at the end of the day — do not really understand any longer, what we *mean* when we speak about God's goodness, power, wisdom, etc., in a superlative way? On the other hand, identity seems to indicate something else, something more fundamental than a *co-extensionality in all possible worlds*. Revealing examples for this problem are the so-called transcendental attributes. If they are interpreted in a maximally comprehensive way, the crucial attributes — 'being', 'one', 'good', or 'true', are applicable of any entity in every possible world. In this case we would have the broadest concept-related co-extensionality, although the meaning 'being, good', and 'true' would nevertheless not be identical; a difference in meaning would remain. This unsurpassable difference in meaning is apparently rooted in the fact that every transcendental is somehow correlated with a specific cognitive/mental power: the ability of identifying and referring, for instance, the ability of voluntary affirmation, or the ability of cognizing something as something.

To prevent an undermining of (AID) through this case, either the co-extensionality of the transcendental attributes would have to be restricted to entities in the actual world Wα (a move which introduces a fundamental difference between being and possible being — with major consequences because of the restricted use of the transcendental attribute in question). Or the (AID) would have to be *suspended* for the specific case of transcendental attributes — what might be argued for based on the insight that transcendental attributes are characterized through their over-categorical and kind-surpassing mode of denoting. Hence, they always cut out something like a basic set — a set which isn't initially portioned and

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40   Cf. *Monologion* XVII: 'Nihil igitur quod de eius essentia vere dicitur, in eo quod qualis vel quanta, sed in eno quod quid sit accipitur. Quidquid enim est quale vel quantum, est etiam aliud in eo quid est; unde non simplex, sed compositum est.'

41   Cf. Hughes, *Simple God*, 62.

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for which no other, more basic version could be found — for all entities in the *universe of discourse*, from which all possible worlds develop and circumscribe their scope of objects; but transcendental attributes do not introduce further differentiations, which are decisive for any notional distinctions based on attribute ascription.

Ontologically, this briefly sketched reconstruction of the first two theses in St. Anselm is based on the view that the perfectly good must be unique and that it can or even must be identified with the perfectly wise, etc. Although this rule of identification sounds reasonable, it presupposes a lot once we try to explain it from a semantic point of view. Suppose — for the sake of illustration — that there are two different worlds Wβ and Wγ. Wβ is a world, which only consists of states of affairs related to cheese, whereas Wγ is a mafia world. The highest good in the cheese world Wβ would presumably be an extraordinarily spicy piece of Swiss cheese, whereas the highest good of the mafia world Wγ might be the unsurpassably ingenious godfather. None of these entities would instantiate the epitome of highest justice or the highest form of wisdom together with its world-features' related form of perfection. But St. Anselm's identity claim, which he sees as the core aspect of divine simplicity, requires nothing less than a necessary connection of the highest goodness with the highest justice and the highest wisdom, etc. We would have to presuppose a version of trans-world-identity — an identity related also to the features and attributes of the highest and most perfect being existing in that very world –, which would be something like a trans-world-perfection of the highest being in question. This is quite a prerequisite, since — on the level of basic ontological features — this idea requires *every* possible world to be structured in a way that a trans-world-identical notion of the perfectly good (which is also the perfectly wise, etc.) can be developed and instantiated *within it* eventually. The problem would be slightly attenuated if we could say that the Swiss cheese or the ideal godfather from Wβ or Wγ do not embody the perfectly good per se, but only the perfectly good *in relation* to the particular and random features of a specific world — features that may not even be eligible for being the axiological point of departure in developing an accurate concept of the most perfect being.

However, let us set aside these problems for the time being; what we got so far is something like an insight into the effects of *divine simplicity*. Even if we still cannot (and maybe never can) say what the very characteristic content of *divine simplicity* actually is, we have gained insight in how divine simplicity serves as a rule of predication when we are ascribing attributes to the divine realm. For now we can already state two rules:

(S^1) The conceptual content of being the perfectly good is co-extensional with the conceptual content of being the perfectly wise, just, beautiful, powerful, etc., in all possible worlds, because the specific content contained in the superlative attribute is applicable to only one addressee, which is necessarily one and the same in every case.

(S^2) If the attributes *F*, *G*, *H* are ascribed to God in the mode of unsurpassable perfection, then they are *necessarily confounded*,[42] i.e. if *x* is God and being *perfectly F* is ascribed to him, then *x* is *perfect-G* in connection with being *perfect H*, etc., by necessity — and this is true for any significantly 'maximized' attribute which expresses an axiological perfection.

Now are there any other ways to develop a concept of identity of attributes, which move away from the rather shaky ground of co-extensionality? I am going to introduce three additional ways to probably get there — with William Vallicella's proposal as the most successful.

A first alternative — whose upsides and downsides are well-known from the philosophy of mind — would try to determine the identity of attributes with the help of their causal efficiency:[43]

(AID*) Two attributes *F* and *G* are exactly identical, if their instantiations *always and necessarily* bring about the very same effect E.

Of course, peril is hidden in the expression 'always and necessarily'. If they are not just taken in the broadest sense or if they aren't taken as something intuitively basic, one would be tempted to interpret them with the help of possible worlds talk again, which will eventually lead us into the same kind of problems as sketched above. Nevertheless, (AID*) is quite useful, even charming, if it is combined with the theology of God. For even if we have to concede that being good, being wise or being just produce different effects — which would be the very reason why we can distinguish the difference in meaning of these attributes — it is, from a speculative point of view, by no means absurd to suggest that perfect wisdom may bring about the very same effects as perfect goodness and perfect justice. In this case the mode of perfection narrows (not only the scope of possible addressees for the ascription of these attributes but also) the scope and range of effects. So, for instance, seeking and longing for God are — as we could say — equally, even in the same way inspired by perfect goodness as by perfect justice. The becoming of the world is initiated in exactly the same way by the highest goodness as by the highest actuality, etc. However, what would we — if we try to figure out a counter example — say about a human being that seeks to relate to the highest truth without longing for the highest goodness or the highest justice? Can we interpret this example as the result of some kind of incomplete understanding of what the highest being must be — an incompleteness due to possible flaws in human knowledge concerning the nature and effects of the highest truth (which are supposed to be exactly the same as the effects of the highest goodness and the highest justice)? Or would our counterexample point to a reasonable possibility — a possibility related to the ability to single out different divine attributes while presupposing their significant difference — and would it be, therefore, *an indication for the fact* that the divine attributes cannot be identical with each other, as long as their genuine content remains different — despite their axiological 'maximizing'?

The phrase 'genuine content' points to another alternative in accessing attribute identification. What we mean by that phrase becomes clear once we start to associate a typical phenomenal intrinsic quality with an attribute: If it does make sense to attach particular phenomenal qualities to attributes — we would not need to be able to do that with any attribute we might come up with or think of but only with those that are relevant for the theology of God, namely being-true, being-just or being-good, etc. — then we can easily see that the briefly sketched and deliberated conditions for the identification of attributes as outlined in (AID) and (AID*) are not sufficient. Instead we would have to introduce this rule:

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42   For the term 'confounding' cf. Schärtl, *Theo-Grammatik*, 370, fn. 672.

43   Cf. Peter Achinstein, "The Identity of Properties", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1974); John Hawthorne, "Causal Structuralism", *Noûs* 35, no. 15 (2001).

(AID**) The attributes *F* and *G* are identical, if their genuine phenomenal content (Q^F and Q^G) is identical.

Maybe Thomas Aquinas would consent to the proposal in (AID**). For, he emphasizes that those expressions, which we use to talk about divine attributes, despite their seeming plurality in reality only designate 'one thing' in God; nevertheless these expressions are not synonymous.[44] Aquinas seems to think that the nuts and bolts of human concept formation are ultimately responsible for this non-synonymy.[45] In principle, however, (AID**) could be used to back up Aquinas' main thesis. But, of course, this leaves us with another, equally serious problem. If Thomas Aquinas is right, we have no chance to understand, yet alone grasp what the 'phenomenal' nature of being God is. Stopping short of apophatic theology, the phenomenal concept of 'plain' power, goodness, wisdom, etc., are the only baselines we have to point to a mystery which is semantically beyond our paygrade. Still, if there is such a relation of indication between the 'plain' attributes and the one phenomenal content of what it is like to be God, it must consist of something more than the formality of being semantically pointed at. In Aquinas the concept of analogy is stabilized by an ontological framework — saying that God's nature is the ultimate cause for finite entities having attributes like power, goodness, wisdom and the like. (AID**) — as we saw — adds a phenomenal aspect to the metaphysics of attributes. Despite its tendency to slip into a version of apophatic theology, the advantage of this principle is that we have an instrument to make sense of those intuitions, which claim that attributes can remain different contentwise — even if their concepts are trans-world-co-extensional and even if the effects brought about by their instantiations are perfectly congruent, while the superlative maximalization of these attributes carves out an addressee and a phenomenal content which is unique and identical for each of the maximized attributes.

William Vallicella points out that a friendly reconstruction of the doctrine of simplicity is possible if we are willing to step on a different metaphysical ground: If we regard properties as some kind of constituents, the relation of instantiation can be replaced by something that helps us interpret properties as some specific kind of particulars.[46] And if we accept that in God's case individuation has to be significantly different from the ways that finite beings become individuated, we mighget closer to the notion of God being identical to his nature: In God there is no matter or any bare particular that would or could do the job of individuation. Therefore, the only 'instance' remaining as a candidate for individuation is God's very own nature.[47] But this changes our metaphysical perspective; lacking any 'outside' cause of individuation we have to regard God's nature as self-individuating and we have to interpret the property the divine nature encapsulates as self-exemplifying. Only if we move from the metaphysical layout of individuation to admitting the possibility of self-individuation and self-exemplification,[48] can we — according to Vallicella — say that there is no difference between God and his nature because the bearer and subject of this nature is the same as the nature itself. As pointed out earlier, Vallicella urges us to move beyond the dualism of individuals and properties/universals.[49]

If we want to have more than just a special area of metaphysics reserved for the doctrine of God only, then — for the sake of implementing a broader metaphysical framework, which allows us to overcome

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44   Cf. Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 13 a. 5 resp. and Aquinas, ScG cap. XXXV.

45   Cf. Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 13 a. 5 resp. However, in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas underlines that the different names, which we have in addressing the divine nature (and also the different predicates for the 'seemingly' different attributes), are in fact a consequence of the mere *human way of acquiring knowledge*. Hence, human beings can ascend to God only via the detour of creation and its plurality of kinds, structures, and forms. Nevertheless, under ideal (eschatological) conditions, we will come to know the *one name* for the one and real attribute the divine nature consists of, which is for now still hidden for us. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ScG cap. XXXI. A certain tension to interpret Aquinas as a role-model of — what we might call — 'weak' co-extensionality (identity of attributes being reinterpreted as the identity of the unique addresses of our attribute ascription) can be seen here.

46   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity" [2015], § 3.

47   Cf. ibid., § 3.1.

48   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity" [1992], 516–517; cf. William F. Vallicella, "On Property Self-Exemplification", *Faith and Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (1994).

49   Cf. ibid., 512–516.

the above-mentioned dualism — it seems to be the case that only a metaphysics of tropes can do the trick.[50] Because tropes are (at least in certain proposals) particulars *serving as* properties, constituents serving as content and content-related, likelihood creating qualities; within the finite realm concrete individuals can be seen as bundles of tropes, while concrete natures are, therefore, bundles of tropes that are maximally similar to each other.

Now, if tropes are particulars there is no further analysis of individuation necessary, yet alone possible: Tropes have the capacity of individuation built into their inner constitution. Although for the constitution of finite things from tropes it might be required to have an 'outside' cause, initiating the bundling of tropes in order to form a concrete individual, we can conceive of non-bundled trope situation in which a 'stupendous' trope has the capacity of individuation all by itself.

In order to reconstruct the idea that the divine attributes are identical and that God is identical to his attributes Vallicella invokes the notion of co-extensionality and puts it into the framework of Quinean nominalism: According to Quine properties can be seen as sets of things which belong to those sets. So, co-extensional sets have the very same elements. Of course, in order to make this concept of co-extensionality viable we have to include actual and possible elements alike. Now how does this help us for our special case? Vallicella underlines that perfect power, perfect wisdom, perfect goodness can be reconstructed as sets having only one element which is the identical individual in every set: God. Therefore, perfect power, perfect wisdom, perfect goodness are co-extensional. If sets are equivalent to properties, the properties in question will be identical, because what a set (and what a property) is — in this view — is fully determined by its elements. Furthermore, perfect power, perfect wisdom, etc., are singletons. Now according to Quines singletons are identical to the element they consist of such that {A} = A. If this is true and if God is the only element in each of the above-mentioned sets, then God is, indeed, identical to his properties.[51]

Maybe some would not be very satisfied with this result. There are, indeed, two questions that can be raised — related to the fact that Vallicella's solution binds itself inescapably to Quinean nominalism:

a) Properties aren't sets. This is just an extravagant result of Quine's nomi)nalism.

b) The identity of singletons and their elements is just a strategy to block useless iterations which would make useless property distinctions: {A} would be different from {{A}}, which would be different from {{{A}}} if we couldn't use Quine's strategy. But, after all, it is just a blocking strategy which might not really help us accomplish something more fundamental: the overcoming of property-individual-dualism.

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50   Apart from their beneficial impact on philosophical theology, adopting trope theory would have a number of additional advantages for the broader area of metaphysics. This way we could show that there is a metaphysical consistency between an interpretation of the doctrine of divine simplicity on the one hand and a fruitful metaphysical theory — helping us with everyday metaphysical problems — on the other hand. According to Douglas Ehring a trope theory has the following metaphysical benefits:

1. Tropes can help us to understand resembling or shared properties. What looks like sharing is built upon classes of exactly similar tropes.

2. Tropes are concrete particulars such that the relation between an individual thing and its tropes can be modelled around a notion of constitution.

3. Tropes can serves as the relata of causal relationships or powers. They are the real glue of causation.

4. Tropes can help us to explain property persistence.

5. Tropes can help us to reassess the metaphysics of events; events can be seen as trope succession.

6. Tropes can help us to reconstruct so-called structural properties (like being H_2O) as structures of tropes.

7. Tropes can be interpreted as the primary objects of our perception and awareness.

8. Tropes can be used to safeguard qualitative content and mental causation.

Cf. Douglas Ehring, *Tropes: Properties, Objects, and Mental Causation* (OUP, 2011), 46–107.

51   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity" [2015], § 3.3.

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Some would say that whatever tool is used to arrive at God being identical to his attributes, it is just metaphysical smoke and mirrors, because this so-called solution rests on premises which are highly disputed and even counter-intuitive. But I think that there is a chance to rewrite Vallicella's story within the narrative of trope theory: Within trope theory we could regard old-fashioned properties — and let's not forget as trope nominalists we have to be antirealists about universals and properties being abstract entities of some sort — as sets of tropes. Since the ontological, i.e. causal role of a property is, according to trope theorists, mainly fulfilled by the tropes themselves, the commonality aspect, hinted at by property language, can be explained by the introduction of sets. As William Vallicella has pointed out correctly, we need a metaphysics that allow for the idea that individuals and properties grow and mature together while sharing the same point of origin: Tropes can be the best candidates to get there. But what would be the trope theoretical picture of God's being identical to his attributes, i.e. his nature? God's nature would be something like a very specific, singled-out trope that fullfils the role of a unique property; and the relevant properties of that singled-out trope would consist of the trope itself. Whatever other properties we want to ascribe to God, the true addressee of these properties (their unique, one and only element) would always be this one, unique trope. If trope theory could take us that far, the interpretation of the doctrine of divine simplicity would not bind us to Quine's sparse metaphysics and his set-theoretical mannerism.

II.2. Truthmaker Identity in a Hegelian Substance

William Vallicella is right in pointing out that — despite our efforts to make sense of divine attribute identity (and to do justice to St. Anselm and Aquinas as well) we are stuck with a predication-problem, which has in a classical manner been expressed by Thomas Aquinas: The fact that we talk about several and 'separate' divine attributes is rather a consequence of our human *modus significandi*,[52] which rather depends on our mundane point of view, than on a really existing plurality of attributes in God. Aquinas offers several reasons for this assumption:

1. If attributes are universals (or if statements regarding attribute ascription are made true by universals) and if universals can always be multiply instantiated, then what we say about God in the manner of an ascription of attributes cannot be based on and grounded in universals. If so, the *uniqueness* of God would be in danger (which also shows that there is an intimate relation between divine simplicity and divine uniqueness).[53]

2. Metaphysically, a plurality of attributes can only be traced back to some sort of composition in the broadest sense — e.g. to the composition of form and matter, which causes an individual x to always be an exemplar of a certain kind A, so that those attributes F, G, H typical for A apply for x,[54] while certain attributes K, L, M, which are typical for a different kind are not ascribable to x.[55] The fact that there are kind-sensitive attributes, which express a commonality among individuals, in addition to attributes that indicate a difference in kind-membership or sub-kind-membership is based on and grounded in a metaphysical composition of some sort.

3. If the possession of attributes (in the sense of a kind-sensitive plurality of attributes) is ontologically bound to the fact that an individual is always the exemplar case of something common), then there must not be any composition or plurality of attributes for God, because he is unique in the strict sense of the word.[56]

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52 Cf. Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 4 a. 2 und q. 13 a. 2.
53 Cf. Aquinas, ScG cap. XXXII.
54 Cf. Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 3 a. 3 resp.
55 Cf. Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 3 a. 2 resp. Aquinas explains the difference between species and kind also by tracing it back to the act-potency-concept, cf. S.Th. Ia q.3 a. 5. Since no potentiality is 'eligible' for God, he cannot be subjected to this way of classifying entities; the above-mentioned distinction does not really apply for the case.
56 Cf. Aquinas, S.Th. Ia q. 3 a. 5 resp.

These three theses confront us with a specific predication-problem we became aware of already in the last paragraph: Either whatever we say about God gets pushed into the direction of apophatic theology because of predication-sensitive incommensurability between God and finite beings — an incommensurability which is shown in the theses above. Or we are forced to abandon the doctrine of divine simplicity and allow for composition or complexity in God for the sake of commensurable and (based on this) literal God-talk.

However the three reasons, sketched above in the spirit of Aquinas, are more or less implicitly dependent on the idea that universals serve as the truthmakers whenever we ascribe (simple or natural, kind-sensitive) attributes under normal circumstances, while God's nature and 'characteristics' must not be subject to such universals, since they present something which is common for the individuals exemplifying these universals such that God would be place on one and the same level of commensurability together with other entities. Furthermore, as abstract, eternal, and (presumably) necessary objects these universals would be metaphysical rivals with God.[57] One way out of the problem — which was already hinted at — could be to interpret the metaphysical basis of the characteristics of God's nature within some sort of trope theory and to introduce tropes as truthmakers for the ascription of attributes. Although *tropes* are not wholly incommensurable with each other, their common features can be interpreted within a rather nominalist framework. Thus, the classifications of species and kinds — a classification which presupposes something which individuals have in common and which seems to require universals as truthmakers — would as a matter of fact become reducible to our merely human ways of *conceptualizing*, so that we could escape the whole problem by taking one step forward: combining anti-realism concerning universals with realism concerning trope theory.[58]

But would this step still suffice to do justice to the demands of divine simplicity? And would this step help us avoid the above-mentioned predication problem? As soon as we keep in mind that divine simplicity is (not exclusively but predominantly) a doctrine about rules of predication for a very specific context, we are reminded that divine simplicity is adjacent to divine eternity, immutability, and the uniqueness of God as such. And to do justice to whatever the content of the doctrine of divine simplicity may be beyond containing a rule of predication, as classic theology shows, above all an element of unity is needed, in which the singularity and uniqueness of the divine can be grounded.

The suggestion of Brower and others,[59] proposing that there is just one truthmaker for what is (necessarily) ascribed to God, is in line with what Thomas Aquinas had in mind, when he emphasizes that different statements invoking seemingly a variety of divine attributes, in reality refer to the only one X (the divine nature) in God. In theory, universals, states of affairs (which are related to universals), or — as mentioned earlier — tropes could be proper candidates to serve as truthmakers. However, it would be quite difficult to explain how one and the same universal or one and the same state of affairs or one and the same trope could be the truthmaker for a variety of statements and predications we unavoidably unfold once we talk about God and his 'characteristics'.

Referring to other demands of classic theism,[60] I therefore propose the idea that the divine *substance* is the truthmaker for what we say about God's nature using a variety of attributes as a concession we have to make to what we can grasp. However, in order to meet the demands of its required role and to fulfil the demands of its admittedly supreme position, this substance must have (at least) one decisive characteristic, which separates it from ordinary, everyday substances: It cannot stand 'above', 'under' or 'next' to its being the bearer of properties and attributes, but it must, instead, entail in itself everything which is the origin and fruit of having attributes — in order to be the one, unique truthmaker of everything which

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57   Cf. Aquinas, ScG LII.

58   For the competition between trope theory and the concept of universals cf. E. J. Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology: A Metaphysical Foundation for Natural Science* (Clarendon Press, 2006), 87–100.

59   Cf. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity", 115.

60   In other contexts, I have tried to show that God does not 'come to know' states of affairs, instead he has a knowledge (by acquaintance or a knowledge of things, respectively) of substances or essences, since his knowledge and knowing must be of a different kind than our human knowledge and our human process of getting to know something, cf. Thomas Schärtl, "The Argument from Consciousness and Divine Consciousness", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 1 (2013).

we say is (necessarily) true of God. In other words: This truthmaker must be a substance, which — so to speak — carries and enlightens its own content, 'gives birth' to its determination out of its own substantiality. In a way this picture complements Vallicella's notion of a self-exemplifying property or nature. In this case we are looking for a concept of substance which does not have attributes by exemplifying a universal or some kind of property — seen as an abstract object being different from that substance, but which has what makes attribute-ascriptions possible by having determination and content already in itself. So we are on the lookout for a concept of substance which has something like property-ness in itself, which lights up as a property by being nothing else but the exemplification of itself. Hence, we are looking for a notion of *substantiality* as indicated by Hegel in his *Science of Logic* — substance as something, which stands entirely in itself *and* which *reflects in itself* its own content as its essence. To Hegel this is the most supreme notion of substantiality; because as the last unity of essence and being, it is the being in *all* being. It is neither the not reflected immediate nor something abstract, something behind existence and appearance. Such a substance would be the immediate reality itself, and this reality *as* absolute *being-reflected in itself*, which would, for Hegel, entail being-in-itself and being-for-itself at the same time. Such a substance would be a unity of being and reflection, it would be essentially appearing despite being-constituted only of itself.[61]

With Hegel's high key notion of substance, which is, in the end, only applicable to God, we may gain a first glance of the truthmaker-candidate attribute-ascriptions to the divine. Referring to such a stupendous substantiality introduces a metaphysical layout for the divine, which ultimately exceeds the seemingly opposite characteristics of having an attribute and being an attribute, of being a universal and being a particular.[62] In Hegel's perspective, the variety of attributes we ascribe to this one substance is something like a reflected plurality, which is not only a result of our human perspective on this exceedingly stupendous substance but which is, to a certain extent, also a result of the inner reflection of this very substance. So in talking about God we also have to be aware of the fact that the variety of attributes we have to use in talking about God is grounded, but also exceeded in the 'self-igniting', self-reflected, 'luminescent' nature of this one stupendous substance. With the help of Hegel's hands we can add a further insight that the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity might lead us to:

(S³) For every (necessary) claim about God there can be only one singular truthmaker: the divine *substance*, whose self-reflecting, content-originating, 'luminescent' character can only be understood in the way explicated by Hegel: This substance is the purest standing-in-itself as the content-, and concept-originating reflection of its substantiality which unfolds content by self-exemplification.

Interestingly enough: The exclusion of composition can be derived from this notion of substance, because constitution is the signature of the finite mode of being, which is apparently different from the non-finite character of a divine Hegelian substance: Finite beings are not in a position to 'give birth' to their inner, essential determination and content solely relating to themselves but by being in relation to something which is causally and, eventually, ontologically superior. So for the most part, composition (and whatever may be ontologically related to that) points to an *ontological dependency*, which does *not fit to* the very character of being a stupendous, luminescent substance.[63]

II.3. The Predication Problem and the Notion of Standard-Objects

We still are left with the unresolved predication problem. What St. Anselm and other role models of classical theism are teaching us is that we have to be aware of the entirely different layout of whatever attribute we ascribe to God once we take divine simplicity into account.[64] God is not only just, but he *is* justice.

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61   Cf. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, 2nd, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Markus Michel, (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 219.

62   Cf. ibid., 219–222.

63   Cf. ibid., 222.

64   Cf. St. Anselm, *Monologion* XVI.

He is not only wise, but he *is* wisdom. He is not only good, but he *is* goodness. This does not only bring up the notion of God being identical to his attributes, it also raises the question whether there is any contact and comparison in meaning if we attribute wisdom to God and, at the same time, attribute wisdom to a finite living being like Socrates. William Vallicella called this the predication problem induced by divine simplicity, which — in modally alleviated version — runs like this:[65]

1) God is wise.

2) Socrates is wise.

3) From 1) and 2) follow that there are, at least, some attributes God and creatures have in common.

4) If God and his creatures have some attributes in common it follows that these attributes need to be different from God as well as from his creatures.

5) If God and his attributes are distinct then the identity thesis which is based on the notion of divine simplicity is clearly wrong.

6) If the identity thesis is true, the predications in 1) and 2) cannot address the very same property.

How can we get around the apparently unwelcome consequences in line 6)? Apparently, we have to spell out a relation between God's wisdom and any 'x being wise', etc., which does not introduce further relations or dependencies as a prerequisite. An answer to our problem may be found in a connection of a *theory of predicates* with a *metaphysics of participation*, which ultimately leads back to Plato. The foundations and the layout of this theory of predication and its metaphysical underpinning (as well as first hints at its relevance for the doctrine of God) can be sketched in the following way:

1) If we say that x has the attribute F, then there must be a standard object[66] F-ness, which is the pure form of being F.

2) If we say that x has the attribute F, then x must participate in the standard object F-ness, so that pure F-ness is the cause for x having F.

3) Since the F-ness is as a paradigm and standard-object, predicating F is measured against, the pure form of F-ness, one would also have to admit that F-ness itself does have/is F. But because F-ness does not participate in anything else beyond itself regarding its very own being F, pure F-ness does not have F/does not be F in the way any other x, which is different from pure F-ness, has or is F. Therefore, being/having F can only apply to F-ness in the mode of an *identity* of F-ness being/having F, which is to be explained in terms of self-participation or self-exemplification in contrast to how finite beings participate in or exemplify F-ness when having/being F.

The first two sentences presuppose a theory of predication, which is closely related to the Platonic doctrine of forms. Traces of this doctrine are still at work in St. Anselm's epistemological and theological concept — although in a somewhat restricted way: 1) and 2) do not apply for any arbitrary predicate or attribute, but only for those which express a maximal perfection beyond the dangers of category mistakes.[67] Furthermore, both theses insinuate that some attributes may appear as being individual-like, which leads to further ontological problems, unless we introduce Hegel's luminescent substances as truthmakers for using these attributes in question.

Finally, sentence 3) offers another key for understanding the 'necessity' of God's being identical to his attributes: This very identity is regarded as the complete content- and reference-related overlap of forms as paradigms and standard-objects with their content-bearing attribute-side. If participation in a standard-object and paradigm is the pre-requisite of having a content-bearing attribute-aspect and if

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65   Cf. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity" [2015], § 4.

66   For the term 'standard object' and for an interpretation of Platonic forms as standard-objects cf. Uwe Meixner, "Eine logische Rekonstruktion der platonischen Prädikationstheorie", *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 43 (1992): 163–75.

67   Cf. St. Anselm, *Monologion* XV.

standard-objects like Platonic forms cannot participate in anything apart from themselves, identity as complete overlap will be the only way out here. Of course, this story leads us knee-deep into the muddy waters of self-predication — a problem Plato famously had addressed himself: How can it possibly make sense to say that the form of piety is pious itself or that the idea wisdom is wise itself, etc.? Plato suggests that normal predications — like Socrates is wise — should be interpreted as *claims about entities in relation to something else*, since some sort of metaphysical participation is the basis of such claims, whereas self-predications have to be understood as *claims about entities with relation to themselves*, which are not based on participating in anything further.[68] This is exactly the point where the notion of identity enters the stage.

Now, this differentiation of two modes of predication can be helpful for the classical doctrine of God, as long as the theory of predication and the metaphysic of participation remain connected to each other. However, let's not forget that we do not have to buy into a realist theory of Platonic forms to arrive at this double-modes-of-predication model. What we can learn from Plato is that there are good reasons to accept two different modes of predication — even within a different ontological layout (namely the framework of trope nominalism, for instance).

Within this model, God basically has to be seen as the one being, which does not and must not participate in anything else, although everything else participates in him. Thus everything we ascribe to God predicatively is not said about him in the 'ordinary' predication-participation-mode, but in the standard-object-mode. Now, how does that resolve the predication problem? The basic intuition coming from the double predication model says that whenever we say God is good, we actually mean that he is the epitome and paradigm, the standard object, i.e. the paradigm of the instantiation of Goodness such that any finite *x* to which goodness is ascribed is measured against this very epitome of (divine) goodness. Semantically, divine goodness and the goodness of a finite entity mean, obviously, not the same. But we stop short of apophatic theology thanks to the fact that the goodness of a finite entity ontologically depends on the epitome of divine goodness. Divine goodness is good in a different way than finite goodness; but this is so because divine goodness only depends on itself for being pure goodness.

In an Anselmian manner we can conclude that the divine perfections are the *epitome* and *standard* for predicates in the sub-lunar world; but it is the 'sub-lunar' world from which we receive the names of these attributes. The idea that God does not just have attributes, but is identical to his attributes must be also be read as *meta*-predicative rule which underlines that all divine attributes must be explicated as an epitome of predication. Of course, we need some restrictions here. As St. Anselm makes us aware the divine attributes aren't of course the standard and paradigm for any mundane attribute: Attributes denoting kinds or relations are ruled out in the Anselmian perspective. Only those mundane attributes that are capable of axiological maximization are eligible for having God's attributes, or his nature respectively, as their epitome and standard. Thus, an axiological perspective on perfection and goodness, maximization and enhancement is written in between the lines of divine simplicity.

What we have sketched so far can be taken as step further in stressing that the stupendous divine substance (understood in a Hegelian way) is the standard object, which is the one ultimate scale for all ascriptions of attributes capable of maximization: Ultimately, God appears to be the ultimate source and the cause of all axiological determinations in every being. The detour via the Hegelian notion of substance enables us to better understand how the divine nature can serve as the epitome of predication in an axiological framework. Ontologically, this can only be redeemed by taking the stupendous divine substance as the truthmaker of all statements presupposing epitomes, since this stupendous substance, so to say, unfolds its being an epitome of its 'luminescent' nature, i.e. by its self-reflected standing-in-itself.

Maybe one is inclined to ask how it is possible that the one and single divine nature serves as the epitome and standard-object of predication for a variety of axiologically maximizable predicates? We can an-

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68   Cf. Constance C. Meinwald, "Good-bye to the Third Man", in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (CUP, 1992). Meinwald refers to Michael Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage Platons Gebrauch von "… ist …" und "… ist nicht …" im Sophistes* (Vandenhoeck Und Ruprecht, 1967).

swer this in pointing out that there is no need to think that a variety of predicates have to be mapped on to a parallel variety of epitomes. For it is reasonable to think that the epitomes of different predicates — if being conceived of as the unsurpassable standard of maximization — overlap completely eventually.

III. DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND THE TRINITY

The above-sketched interpretation of divine simplicity leaves some space for a reconciliation with Trinitarian theology; nevertheless it has to be admitted right from the start that the likelihood of reconciling Social Trinitarianism with the doctrine of divine simplicity is slim. Jordan P. Barrett has argued in his book that we would have to introduce a notion of diversity into the divine in order to reconcile simplicity with Trinitarian Faith. Such a concept of diversity needs, as he points out, to be stronger than virtual distinctions but weaker than real distinctions. Barrett envisions some sort of 'analogy of diversity' (without really explaining the point of comparison if there is such an analogy) in order to arrive at a reconciliation of divine simplicity and the Trinity.[69] But what kind of inner differentiation or diversity is reconcilable with, at least, a transformative understanding of divine simplicity — an understanding that wants to save as many aspects of a reconstructive reading of the classical understanding of divine simplicity as possible? In my opinion Latin Trinitarianism and its reception in German idealism (or idealism-based theology) might offer the framework we are looking for. Two steps are necessary to move forward without destroying the commitment to divine simplicity:

1) The Trinitarian persons cannot be persons in the sense of the individual substance of which God is composed. Rather the Trinitarian persons are certain relations, by which the one stupendous divine substance stands to itself. If we adapt this view, then it will be easier to understand how the stupendous divine substance can also be the truthmaker for statements about the Trinity: in being also the reality in which the relations are grounded, because the nature of these relations ultimately points to the substance itself.

2) In order to enable the stupendous substance to perform this task, the notion of substance must be expanded to a suitable concept of the absolute, for which certain relations in which it stands to itself are necessary. (We might as well call them immanent relations.)

Again, the role model for a concept meeting the standards mentioned in paragraph 2) can be derived from Hegel. What could be meant by immanent relations in which a stupendous substance stands to itself is summed up in the notion of a self-interpretation/self-grasping of the absolute by itself. Hegel starts with a negative notion of an absolute being, which seems to be a simple and solid entity whose identity is not determined, because any determination of *essence* and *existence* or even of *being* or reflection are completely dissolved in it. Now Hegel reminds us that as a first step any *determination* of that, *what the absolute would be*, requires a certain negation. But if this negation is required and is something the absolute necessarily has to undergo, this process of determination by negation has to be a characteristic of the absolute itself. Therefore, the determination, which is required for the absolute to have content and not just to be a monolithic but entirely dead oneness, must be *internal* to the absolute. So the only adequate way of determination cannot consist of external reflection, which would squeeze the absolute into imposed boundaries, but must consist of the absolute's very own self-*interpretation*. Only by self-interpretation, which requires that the absolute stands in relations to itself, can the absolute reveal what it truly is.[70] If the notion of being an absolute were taken literally — i.e. being an isolated absolute, in which every kind of relationship has vanished — then we would be bound to a purely *negative, apophatic notion* of the absolute, as Hegel emphasizes. A positive, i.e. kataphatic notion of the absolute conceives of the absolute as a truly absolute absolute, which, to Hegel, is a self-mediated absolute: being engaged in a process of mediation which does not abscond itself from a 'bottom-up' determination (from our and from

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69   Cf. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, chap. 6.
70   Cf. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, 187.

the world's point of view). If it had to abscond itself this would be due to an inability of being subject to a kind of determination—which, indeed, would be a sign of a not yet absolute absolute. To undergo determination without being subject to an outside force entails that the absolute is able *to determine itself*.[71] Hence, such a self-determination can only adequately be interpreted on the basis of relations in which the absolute as the stupendous substance stands to itself. In this view the Trinitarian persons are nothing but the relations, in which the absolute as the stupendous substance enters into a relationship to itself in order to determine itself and to be determined in an ultimate way.

From Hegel we can move on to Johannes von Kuhn's concept in his Trinitarian theology, which holds tightly on to idealistically shaped interpretations of divine simplicity. For Kuhn, Hegel's concept of divine self-determination through self-understanding and self-mediation is the bedrock of Trinitarian theology.[72] Of course this very process of self-mediation must not be understood as temporal at all—we would find a strong negation of theistic temporalism here, since eternal omnipresence is the condition for talking about a God, who is the beginning as well as the result of this very process of self-mediation. Kuhn underlines that the divine process of self-mediation must be thought of as *eternal*. Hence, we cannot suppose that God is *first*—as principal of the process—unconscious or a mere substance in order to become conscious and mighty *afterwards*, at the end of the process, i.e. that he becomes a subject or spirit. Instead we should accept that God as spirit or subject is the process itself by going out of himself and by mediating himself with himself, since, according to the explicit determinations of the dogma, we have to think of the personality of God as an eternal process of personification in a similar way.[73] Therefore, the Trinitarian persons as relations are instances and benchmarks of the divine process of being a subject, the instances of divine self-mediation in an *eternal event*, in which God mediates himself from being-a-substance. God is not an abstract absolute, which would be a hermetically closed unity, but he is the *concrete absolute*, who is spirit and who mediates himself in this spirit.[74] The very basic similarity between the finite and the infinite spirit[75] supports all human attempts to approach the Trinity in the mode of analogy or in a conceptual way, because the finite spirit also gains his subjectivity only from the mediation of itself.

It is not just a coincidence that Johannes von Kuhn adapts Hegel's philosophy of mind and metaphysics of spirit, because to him mind and self-consciousness are the closest analogy for what it is like to be simple but to not be a monolithically closed entity. What we can conceive of the human mind—i.e. that it creates the unity of consciousness and awareness out of qualitative transparency while it stands in relations to itself in order to fire up self-consciousness—is also true for the one divine nature. Although we might not be in a position to imagine what the divine self-transparency of the divine nature (and the Trinity 'producing' relations which are presupposed to induce this kind of transparency) really are, we nevertheless have, at least, a clue of what it is to be a substance in relation to itself thanks to our mind-gifted nature.

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71   Cf. ibid., 190.
72   Cf. Johannes v. Kuhn, *Die christliche Lehre von der göttlichen Dreieinigkeit* (1857), 578.
73   Cf. ibid., 563.
74   Cf. ibid., 551.
75   Cf. ibid., 552, 579.

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