

Divine Simplicity

Introduction

The doctrine of divine simplicity is perhaps the most difficult and controversial piece of medieval philosophical theology but also one of the most important.¹ It derives from the conviction that God is a being whose existence is an absolutely perfect being, self-explanatory, completely actual.² Aquinas was among the most influential expositors and defenders of this doctrine, and the doctrine is central to his philosophy and theology. It is not possible to do justice to this doctrine in short space; here I will only sketch its basic outlines.³

The doctrine of simplicity, as Aquinas understands it, can be summarized in three claims.

The first distinguishes God from material objects:⁴

- (1) It is impossible that God have any spatial or temporal parts that could be distinguished from one another as here rather than there or as now rather than then.

The second claims that the standard distinction between an entity's essential and intrinsic accidental properties cannot apply to God:⁵

- (2) It is impossible that God have any intrinsic accidental properties.

And the third rules out the possibility of components of any kind in the essence that is the divine nature. Even when it has been recognized that all God's intrinsic properties must be essential to him, it must be acknowledged as well that

- (3) whatever can be intrinsically attributed to God must in reality just be the unity that is his essence.

For this reason, God is his own essence or nature.⁶ For all things other than God, there is a difference between what they are and that they are, between their essence and their existence; but on the doctrine of simplicity the essence that is God is not different from God's existence. Therefore, unlike all other entities, God is his own being.

There is a large literature attempting to explain and evaluate these claims, and it is not possible in this brief essay to explore the controversies at issue in this literature. Here I will just outline the heart of the doctrine by focusing on Aquinas's connection between God's simplicity and the *quid est* or essence of God.

Agnosticism about God's nature

It is helpful to begin by setting aside one interpretation of Aquinas's position.

Aquinas places a discussion of God's simplicity at the beginning of his treatment of the nature of God in the *Summa theologiae*,⁷ and he begins that discussion with a short prologue. In the prologue, he says,

“When we know with regard to something *that* it is, we still need to ask about its mode of being (*quomodo sit*), in order to know with regard to it what it is (*quid sit*). But because we are not able to know with regard to God what he is, but [rather] what he is not, we cannot consider with regard to God what the mode of being is but rather what the mode of being is not it can be shown with regard to God what the mode of being is not by removing from him those things not appropriate to him, such as composition and motion and other things of this sort.”

This passage and others like it have sometimes been cited as evidence for an interpretation of Aquinas as committed to the *via negativa* in a radical way. So, for example, in presenting Aquinas’s position on human knowledge of God, David Burrell says,

“”That God’s nature, otherwise utterly unknown, must be affirmed simply to be, gives a warrant of sorts for taking to-be as an act.”⁸

And Leo Elders says,

“”The comprehension of God’s essence is altogether excluded. This conclusion is presupposed in the Prologue to the Third Question. . . . Even if we say that God is perfect, good or eternal, we must realize that we do not know what these terms mean when predicated of God.”⁹

Claims such as this can give the impression that, for Aquinas, because of God’s simplicity, it is not possible for human beings to have any positive knowledge of God. On this interpretation of Aquinas’s views, Aquinas maintains that because God is simple, human beings can know what God is *not*, but they cannot know anything of what God is.¹⁰

But caution is warranted here. It is true that Aquinas explains divine simplicity in terms of what God is not — not a body, not composed of matter and form, and so on. On the other hand, however, in the course of showing what God is not, Aquinas relies heavily on positive claims about God. So, for example, he argues that God is not a body on the basis of these claims among others: God is the first mover; God is pure actuality; God is the first being; God is the most noble of beings. In arguing that God is not composed of matter and form, Aquinas in fact makes a huge, substantial, positive metaphysical claim about the nature of God. He says,

“a form which is not able to be received in matter but is subsistent by itself (*per se subsistens*) is individuated in virtue of the fact that it cannot be received in something else. And God is a form of this sort.”¹¹

In ST I q.13, the question about the names of God, Aquinas explicitly repudiates the sort of agnosticism some scholars attribute to him; Aquinas himself associates such a position with Moses Maimonides and attacks it vigorously. In still other texts, Aquinas

bluntly rejects the view that human beings can have no positive knowledge of God. In QDV q.7 a.5, for example, he says,

“the understanding of a negation is always based on some affirmation. And this is clear from the fact that every negation is proved by an affirmation. For this reason, unless the human intellect knew something affirmatively about God, it would be unable to deny anything of God.”

For all these reasons, it is a mistake to read the prologue to ST I q.3 as implying a radical agnosticism with regard to knowledge of God.

The problem in interpreting Aquinas’s remarks in the prologue correctly has to do with the expression ‘*quid est*’ in the claim that we do not know of God what he is (*quid est*).¹² The expression *quid est* is a technical term of medieval logic. For example, Peter of Spain, the author of a standard scholastic logic text, gives the traditional medieval formula for a genus as “that which is predicated of many things differing in species in respect of what they are (*in eo quod quid est*)”. The same phrase in a slightly different definition captures the notion of species. The *quid est* of something therefore has to do with the genus or species of that thing, or more generally, with the kind of thing it is. So if one cannot know something’s *quid est*, one cannot know what *kind* of thing it is.

It is helpful to see in this connection that one can know a great deal about something even if one does not know (or cannot know) what kind of thing it is. According to quantum physics, we do not know what kind of thing light is. The best we can do is sometimes to think of light as a wave and sometimes to think of it as a particle, although we certainly understand that nothing can be at the same time both a wave and a particle. And yet we have a great deal of positive knowledge about light, notwithstanding our inability to know what kind of thing light is.

Esse and id quod est

On the doctrine of simplicity, God is his own *quid est* or essence, and his essence is being or *esse*. It seems to follow from these claims that God is *esse*. (Given the difficulties of the doctrine, in what follows I will use the Latin terms for the concepts crucial to the interpretation defended here.)

In his commentary on Boethius’s treatise *De hebdomadibus*, Aquinas makes a careful distinction between *esse* and an entity or *id quod est* (literally, *that which is*).¹³ Among the many differences between *esse* and *id quod est* that Aquinas introduces, he calls attention to the fact that ‘*id quod est*’ signifies something concrete whereas ‘*esse*’ does not.¹⁴ He also highlights the fact that *id quod est* is particular¹⁵ whereas *esse* is not.¹⁶ In these and other ways, Aquinas argues for the metaphysical difference between *esse* and *id quod est*. Since, on the doctrine of simplicity, God is *esse*, and *esse* is distinct from *id quod est* in these ways, some scholars conclude that for Aquinas God is not an entity at all.¹⁷ For such scholars, this is a strength of Aquinas’s position, because it emphasizes the transcendence of God, who is not to be numbered as one entity among others.¹⁸

It is another advantage of this interpretation that it helps to explain the three basic claims of the doctrine of simplicity formulated above. Nothing which is not an *id quod est* has temporal or spatial parts. And nothing which is not an *id quod est* has intrinsic

accidents either. For example, *animality* and *whiteness* have no intrinsic accidents. They are the wrong *sort* of thing, we might say, to have intrinsic accidents. If we think of intrinsic accidents as belonging somewhere in the nine Aristotelian categories other than substance, then it is easy to see why nothing that is not an *id quod est* should be thought to have intrinsic accidents. *Whiteness* does not have a certain size or quantity, for example; it does not engage in action or receive the action of anything else -- and so on. *Whiteness* is what it is -- whiteness -- and nothing else at all.

Furthermore, in the case of *esse*, if it is not an *id quod est*, then even existence cannot be attribute to it in any way. If it is not an *id quod est*, then it would be true that there *is esse*; but its being *esse* would be all there is to it. We could not separate *esse* into itself and its existence. If we did, *esse* would become something concrete, an *id quod est* rather than only *esse*.

So thinking in these ways of God as only *esse* helps to make sense of the three claims of simplicity presented at the outset.

The problem is that, so understood, the concept of God as nothing more than *esse* seems religiously pernicious. Alvin Plantinga puts the problem in terms of God's being a property, but his objections remain the same if we transpose his 'property' into '*esse*' (where *esse* is taken as something that is not an *id quod est*). Plantinga says,

"This view [that God is identical to *esse*] 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."¹⁹

And Plantinga summarizes the problem in a way which is especially apt for my purposes here. He says,

"If God is a property, then he isn't a person..."²⁰

We do not need to worry whether a triune God can be thought of as *a person* in order to see the power of Plantinga's complaint. Even on the doctrine of the Trinity, which takes God to consist in three persons (where 'person' has a technical, theological sense), God is characterized by mind and will. Anything with mind and will, however, is an *id quod est*. For this reason, Plantinga is right to say that if God is a property -- or only *esse* -- then God is not a person, in our sense of the word 'person'. Nothing that is not an *id quod est* could be a person or enter into personal relationship with human persons. As far as that goes, nothing that is not an *id quod est* can act at all.

Consequently, if the doctrine of simplicity implies that God is *esse* alone, then it seems that many of the standard divine attributes discussed and accepted by Aquinas cannot be applied to God. Those attributes apply only to something that is an *id quod est*. Moreover, many of the biblical stories about God's interactions with human persons, which Aquinas himself takes seriously and literally,²¹ cannot be understood as Aquinas understands them if God is only *esse* and not *id quod est*.

So, here is where matters stand. As Aquinas himself is at pains to show in his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*, there is all the difference in the world between something which is *esse* and something which is *id quod est*. If the doctrine of simplicity is correctly understood as some defenders of the doctrine, and some detractors

of it such as Plantinga, suppose, to mean that God is only *esse*, then it is hard to know how to ward off the dramatic infelicities Plantinga laments.

Quantum metaphysics

It is worth noticing, however, that on this interpretation, represented by both defenders and detractors of the doctrine, we do in fact know the *quid est* of God, at least to some limited extent. That is because, on this interpretation, we know that God is *esse*; and we know something about the *quid est* of *esse*, as Aquinas's own discussion of it in his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus* show, where he gives a detailed characterization of the nature of *esse*. So, if the doctrine of simplicity has to be interpreted as claiming that God is only *esse* and nothing more, then, on Aquinas's own views, we would actually know a reasonable amount about the *quid est* of God. But, as we saw, Aquinas is insistent that we are unable to know the *quid est* of God because of God's simplicity. And so the implication that we do know a reasonable amount about the *quid est* of God should be a warning sign about this interpretation.

In my view, the problem with this interpretation is not that it identifies God with *esse*. The problem is that it rejects the notion of God as *id quod est*. This rejection looks sensible, especially given Aquinas's care to distinguish *esse* from *id quod est*; but, in fact, it is not true to Aquinas's position.

In his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*, Aquinas begins his discussion of *esse* and *id quod est* by saying,

“We signify one thing by ‘*esse*’ and another thing by ‘*id quod est*’, just as we signify one thing by ‘running’ (*currere*) and another thing by ‘a runner’ (*currens*). For ‘running’ and ‘*esse*’ signify in the abstract, just as ‘whiteness’ also does; but ‘*id quod est*’, that is, ‘an entity’, and ‘a runner’, signify in the concrete, just as ‘a white thing’ also does.”²²

And he concludes that discussion this way:

“it is evident on the basis of what has been presented that in composite things *esse* and *id quod est* differ as regards the things themselves (*realiter*)²³ And so [Boethius] says that in every composite thing, *esse* is one thing, and the composite thing itself [the thing as *id quod est*] is another.”²⁴

But, having worked so hard to distinguish between *esse* and *id quod est* in this way, Aquinas then goes on immediately to say something that is on the face of it quite surprising. He says,

“In simple things, [however,] *esse* itself and *id quod est* must be one and the same as regards the things themselves (*realiter*).”²⁵

And, after giving an argument that there cannot be more than one thing which is both *esse* and also *id quod est*, Aquinas sums up his position by saying

“This one sublime simple is God himself.”²⁶

On Aquinas’s view, then, the distinction he has been arguing for between *esse* and *id quod est* does not hold in God’s case. It is true that God is *esse*, as the doctrine of simplicity makes clear. But this *esse* is also -- somehow -- an *id quod est*.

We could suppose that in making this claim about God Aquinas is willing to violate the laws of logic as regards God, since he himself has just shown that the characteristics of *esse* and those of *id quod est* are incompatible. But this would be a rash conclusion, since in many other places Aquinas manifestly supposes that even God cannot do what is logically contradictory.²⁷ But if we remember Aquinas’s insistence that we cannot know the *quid est* for God, then another interpretation suggests itself. Another way to think about the doctrine of simplicity as Aquinas understands it is as the expression of a kind of quantum metaphysics.

What kind of thing is it which has to be understood both as a wave and as a particle? We do not know. That is, we do not know the *quid est* of light. At the ultimate foundation of all reality, things get weird, we might say. The ultimate foundation of *physical* reality includes light, and our best attempt at understanding the kind of thing light is requires alternately attributing to it incompatible characteristics. Analogously, we can ask: What kind of thing is it which can be both *esse* and *id quod est*? We do not know. The idea of simplicity is that at the ultimate *metaphysical* foundation of reality is something that has to be understood as *esse* -- but also as *id quod est*. We do not know what kind of thing this is either. And this conclusion is precisely what we should expect from Aquinas’s insistence that we do not know the *quid est* of God.

As Aquinas sees it, however, we can have considerable positive knowledge about God, even so, just as we can have a significant body of knowledge about light, even according to quantum physics. We can begin by recognizing that God’s nature is such that there is something false about conceiving of it either as *esse* alone or as *id quod est* alone. That is why Aquinas says of God,

“With regard to what God himself is (*secundum rem*), God himself is neither universal nor particular.”²⁸

For this reason, we have to exercise care in the way we frame our claims about God. It is acceptable to say that God is *esse*, provided that we understand that this claim does not rule out the equally true claim that God is *id quod est*, an entity, a concrete particular.

Aquinas puts the point this way:

“Those material creatures that are whole and subsistent are composite. But the form in them is not some complete subsisting thing. Rather, the form is that by means of which some thing *is*. For this reason, all the names imposed by us to signify some complete subsisting thing signify in the concrete, as is appropriate for composite things. But those names that are imposed to signify simple forms signify something not as subsisting but rather as that by means of which something is, as for example ‘whiteness’ signifies that by means of which something is white. Therefore because God is both simple and subsistent, we attribute to God both abstract names -- to signify God’s simplicity -- and concrete names -- to signify God’s completeness and concreteness.

Nonetheless, each kind of name falls short of God's mode [of being], just as our intellect does not know God as he is, in this life."²⁹

We can gain insight into Aquinas's position here by considering that there are Scriptural texts claiming that God is loving and Scriptural texts claiming that God is love.³⁰ It seems, however, that these claims cannot be true together. If they were, it would have to be true that love is loving. But love is abstract and universal. And, as Plantinga objects, an abstract universal is not a person; it is not the sort of thing that can be loving. So it seems just a category mistake to attribute loving to love. On Aquinas's understanding of the doctrine of simplicity, however, we can make sense of both these Scriptural claims. Because God is simple and we do not comprehend his *quid est*, the best we can do is to adopt quantum metaphysics. Sometimes we have to characterize God with abstract terms -- and so we say that God is love -- and sometimes we have to characterize him with concrete terms -- and so we say that God is loving.

Consequently, it turns out that, in one sense, Plantinga is after all in agreement with Aquinas. Each of them thinks that God must be characterized as an *id quod est*, a concrete entity. The difference between them lies precisely in the quantum metaphysics mandated by the doctrine of simplicity. For Aquinas, it is right to describe God as an *id quod est*, capable of creating, loving, and acting -- but only with the proviso that it is *also* right to think of God as being *esse*.

Conclusion

On the doctrine of eternity, God is outside time.³¹ Some scholars have taken that doctrine to imply that God cannot act, since (on their view) all action presupposes temporal duration or temporal location; or they have supposed that God's mode of existence is that of a frozen point, as it were, without duration of any kind, since (on their view) all duration is persistence through time. In effect, such an interpretation takes the doctrine of eternity to imply a metaphysical smallness about an eternal God by comparison with temporal creatures. But, on Aquinas's view, an eternal God is able to act at any and every point in time, and his mode of existence is broad enough to encompass all of time within it.³² From Aquinas's point of view, the doctrine of eternity implies a metaphysical greatness about God, above the status of any creatures in time.

There is an analogous conceptual move to be made as regards interpretations of the doctrine of simplicity. On the doctrine of simplicity, God is without parts of any kind whatsoever; there is no composition in God. Some scholars have taken the doctrine to imply that God is identical only to *esse*,³³ giving rise to the complaint voiced by Plantinga that a simple God cannot act as persons do, or to the equally worrisome objection that everything about God is absolutely necessary, since there are no accidents in God. In effect, such an interpretation takes the doctrine of simplicity to make God metaphysically more limited than concrete things such as composite human beings, who can act and who can do otherwise than they do.

But this is to get the doctrine upside down. The doctrine of simplicity implies that at the ultimate metaphysical foundation of all reality there is *esse*. But it also implies that this *esse*, without losing any of its characteristics as *esse*, is something subsistent and

concrete, with more ability to act and with more freedom in its acts than any concrete composite entity has. Trying to summarize this idea, Aquinas says,

“although God is *esse* only [and not something composite, as material creatures are], ... nonetheless God has all the perfections which are in all the genera [of created things].... And this is because all these perfections come together in him in accordance with his simple *esse*. By way of analogy, if someone could bring about the functioning of all qualities by means of one quality, he would have [in effect] all the qualities in that one quality. In just this way, God has all the perfections in his *esse*”.³⁴

The difficulty of thinking one's way up the ladder of being can leave one with the impression that the immutable, impassible, eternal, simple God of Thomistic philosophical theology is frozen, static, inert, unresponsive, and incapable of action. But Aquinas's notion of God is exactly the opposite. If it were not so subject to misinterpretation, one might well say that for Aquinas God is maximally dynamic, and not static at all. On Aquinas's views, there is more ability to act -- one might say, more action -- on the part of a God with the classical divine attributes than there could be on the part of a composite entity acting in time.³⁵ That is why Aquinas can say that in the *esse* that is God there are all the perfections of all the genera of created things -- including responsiveness and action, which are perfections of any *id quod est* with mind and will.³⁶

On this way of understanding divine simplicity, when the *esse* that is God acts, its action is not an accident in it. This is not because *esse* is an inert universal that is the same in all possible worlds. Rather, it is because this *esse* is more metaphysically one than any composite thing could be. When it acts, it acts just as *esse*, and its acting remains within its character as *esse*. That is, the acts engaged in by the *esse* that is also an *id quod est* are not added on to *esse* as something additional to *esse*. In acting, the *esse* that is God remains *esse*; it does not become *esse* plus the property of acting. The *esse* that is the ultimate foundation of reality can do more than created, composite things without ceasing to be *esse* only. That is why, in the power and the richness that is *esse*, God can also do otherwise than he does without ceasing thereby to be *esse*.

In our sense of the term, then, there is contingency in God. As Aquinas himself is at pains to point out, Christians are committed to the claim that God can do otherwise than he does. Creation is a free and not a necessitated act on God's part.³⁷ But it is still not the case that there are accidents in God. For composite things, contingency (in our sense of the term) comes with composition of subject and accident; but not for God.

For this reason, it is also the case that a simple God can be responsive to things in time. A simple God cannot do anything *after* something happens in time, but a simple God can certainly act *because of* something that happens in time. That is because, if something in time had been otherwise, a simple God might have acted otherwise than he did. To say this is clearly not to say that God decides what to do after something happens in time or that God can change in time. To say this is only to claim that God can do otherwise than he does, as Aquinas explicitly claims.³⁸ As long as a simple God can do what he does *because of* what happens in time, God can be responsive to things in time.

To try to explain the doctrine of simplicity in this way is not to provide an argument for the truth or even the compatibility of its claims. It is just to try to contribute

to insight into this most challenging part of Thomistic philosophical theology. If, *contra* Aquinas, we could grasp the *quid est* of something that is both *esse* and *id quod est*, we might understand exactly how to explain what kind of thing can be described in all these ways. But, as it is, on Aquinas's views, we do not comprehend God's *quid est*; and so we are limited to the kind of quantum metaphysics sketched here.³⁹

¹ This doctrine has also been the subject of a voluminous literature. The most sustained and sophisticated attack on Aquinas's position can be found in Christopher Hughes, *A Complex Theory of a Simple God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Hughes's attack, however, seems to me based on misunderstandings of crucial elements of Aquinas's metaphysics, as reviewers have pointed out (see, for example, David B. Burrell, *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 72, no. 1 (Jan 1992), 120-121), and so I will not consider it here.

² The derivation of divine simplicity from such considerations is apparent in Aquinas's *QDP* 7.I, as Mark D. Jordan has pointed out in his article "The Names of God and the Being of Names" in Alfred J. Freddoso, ed., *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 161-190; see esp. pp. 176-179.

³ For more extended discussion, see the chapter on simplicity in my *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003). For sympathetic treatments published since then, see, for example, Jeffrey Brower, "Making Sense of Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008) 3-30., and Brian Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006) 365-80, and Brian Davies, "Simplicity", in Chad Meister and Charles Taliaferro (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2009). For recent book-length treatment, see Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity. An Investigation into the Foundations of His Philosophical Theology*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008).

⁴ *ST* Ia.3.1-2; cf. also *ST* Ia 9.1 and 10.1.

⁵ *ST* Ia.3.6.

⁶ *ST* Ia.3.3.

⁷ *ST* Ia 3.

⁸ David Burrell, *Aquinas. God and Action*, (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p.139. See also pp.60-61. "We cannot speak of God at all... [on Aquinas's theory of divine simplicity] unless it be under the rubric of 'the first cause of all.' Yet such a cause leaves no proper traces since its *modus operandi* cannot conform to the ordinary patterns whereby effect resembles cause... In the measure, then, that our language embodies a subject/predicate, genus/species grammar..., no description can succeed in identifying a trace of divinity."

⁹ Leo Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1990), p.143.

¹⁰ For discussion of this position in the secondary literature, see the chapter on simplicity in my *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹¹ *ST* Ia.3.3 ad 3.

¹² See, in this connection, particularly *SCG* I.14.

¹³ In this connection, cf. also *De ente et essentia* c.3. Cf. also the entry on being by John Wippel in this volume.

¹⁴ In *De hebd.* II. 22.

¹⁵ In *De hebd.* II. 24.

¹⁶ There is a complication in this regard which I can only touch on in this brief essay. The *esse* at issue here must be distinguished from *esse* which is common to all things in existence. (In this respect, see especially *De ente et essentia* c.5.) This common *esse* is a mental abstraction and so is a universal in the sense of the term usual for Aquinas, who takes universals to exist only in the mind. What distinguishes the *esse* which is God from the common *esse* is that the divine *esse* precludes combination with anything else, whereas the common *esse* is open to combination with form and matter. Even with this distinction between common and divine *esse*, however, divine *esse* considered just as *esse* is not concrete or particular. It does not follow that God is a universal for Aquinas, or that for Aquinas there is *one* universal which exists outside the mind, namely, God. As the rest of this essay makes clear, the heart of Aquinas's position is that we cannot know the *quid est* of God. The best we can do is to alternate between language which identifies God with what is universal -- "God is love" -- and languages which identifies God with a concrete particular -- "God is loving".

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- ¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Leo Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1990), p.22; “For St. Thomas God is never “an object”, for God is far above our understanding.”
- ¹⁸ Cf., e.g., David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); and, more recently, “Act of Creation with Its Theological Consequences”, in *Aquinas on Doctrine*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum, (London/NY: T&T Clark, 2004).
- ¹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), p.47.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ As he does, for example, with regard to God’s interactions with Job; see his prologue to his *Expositio super Job*.
- ²² *In De hebd.*, 22.
- ²³ The qualifier ‘*realiter*’ is needed here because in the preceding discussion Aquinas has examined the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* considered as concepts. Once that conceptual distinction has been established, he moves next to show that the conceptual distinction is exemplified by all composite things, but that it does not apply to the one thing which is entirely simple, namely, God.
- ²⁴ *In De hebd.*, 32.
- ²⁵ *In De hebd.*, 33. Cf. also, e.g., *SCG I.c.38*.
- ²⁶ *In De hebd.*, 35.
- ²⁷ For an excellent discussion of Aquinas’s theory of modality and its connection to God’s nature, see Timothy Pawl, *A Thomistic Account of Truthmakers for Modal Truths*, Saint Louis University Dissertation, 2008.
- ²⁸ *ST Ia q.13 a.9 ad 2.*
- ²⁹ *ST Ia q.13 a.1 ad 2.* Cf. also *SCG I.c.30*.
- ³⁰ For an example of the first, see I John 4:10; and for an example of the second, see I John 4:8.
- ³¹ For defense of this claim, see the chapter on eternity in my *Aquinas 2003*; for a contrasting view, see the essay on eternity by Brian Leftow in this volume.
- ³² For explanation and defense of these claims, see the chapter on eternity in my *Aquinas 2003*.
- ³³ That is, not to common *esse* but to the *esse* that is God; for the distinction see footnote 13.
- ³⁴ *De ente et essentia c.5 30.*
- ³⁵ God’s actuality or act of being is an important implication of the doctrine of divine simplicity, but a detailed exploration of this issue has to be left to one side in this brief essay.
- ³⁶ In this connection, it is hard to resist calling attention to the case of light again. When Newton first discovered that white light contained within it all the richness of the other colors of light, there was considerable opposition to his finding. The opposition supposed that the simplicity of white light *excluded* the other colors, whose richness was thought to be somehow tarnishing of the pure whiteness of white light. Goethe, who was among the opposition, summed up this sort of attitude by saying that white light is “the simplest most undivided most homogenous being that we know.” I am indebted to Andrew Pinsent for the point and the historical information.
- ³⁷ For a discussion of this point and the relevant Thomistic texts, see the chapter on simplicity in my *Aquinas 2003*.
- ³⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this point, see the chapter on simplicity in my *Aquinas 2003*.
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