



# Divine Simplicity



# Overview

Reminder

Simplicity

- Unchangeable

- No properties

- Nature = existence

Objections

- It is difficult to talk about God, but maybe we can, by analogy
- Arguments for God's existence: ontological, cosmological, design, . . .
- Maybe it is rational to believe in God even if we cannot demonstrate his existence
- **But then:** what can we say about God? What is God like?

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That “God is simple” is endorsed by a huge number of authors:

- Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas
- Maimonides
- Averroes

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## Augustine, *De civitate* XI.10

“The reason why a nature is called simple is that it cannot lose any attribute it possesses, that there is no difference between what it *is* and what it *has*, as there is, for example, between a vessel and the liquid it contains, a body and its colour. . . . None of these *is* what it contains. . . .”

- 1 God is simple because unchangeable
- 2 God does not possess different properties or attributes.
- 3 There is no difference between God's nature and his existence; it is God's nature to exist.

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# 1. Unchangeable

- God is perfect, hence timeless; timeless, hence immutable. (Anselm)
- God is the creator of everything apart from himself; the 'everything' includes a changeable world; only something immutable can account for the existence of a changeable world; therefore, God is changeless. (Aquinas)

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## 2. No properties or attributes

- God is perfect, hence wholly indivisible; hence, no parts. Attributes would be parts; hence, no attributes. (Anselm)
- God is immaterial; hence, he cannot be an instance of a kind; hence, God is the divine nature. Therefore, no extra added attributes. (Aquinas)

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### 3. God's nature is God's existence

#### Aquinas

“If the existence of a thing is to be other than its nature, that existence must either derive from the nature, or have an external cause. Now it cannot derive merely from the nature, for nothing with derived existence suffices to bring itself into being. It follows then that, if a thing's existence differed from its nature, that existence must be externally caused. But we cannot say this about God.”

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# Objections to Divine Simplicity

- 1 If God is living, God changes.
- 2 If God is loving, God changes.
- 3 If God is immutable, then God is not free.
- 4 If God knows, then God is changeable.
- 5 If God is simple, then God is a property, which is absurd.

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# 1. Life and Change

Does 'living' mean 'not static'?

- cf. rocks vs. cats or flowers
- but 'living' is more than that; perhaps 'automobile' or 'autonomous'.
- in that sense, we can say that God is living because he is not "made to move" by other things, and determines his own effects.
- agency is tied to change in the *patient* rather than in the agent (cf. teaching).



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## 2. Love and Change

- does 'love' only mean 'passion'?
- maybe: love = good-willing

### Aquinas

“God loves all existing things. For in so far as it is real each is good; the very existence of each single thing is good, and so also is whatever it rises to. . . . God’s will is the cause of things, and. . . in so far as it has reality or any goodness at all, each thing must be willed by God. God therefore wills some good to each existing thing, and since loving is no other than willing good to someone, it is clear that God loves everything.”

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### 3. Freedom and Change

- can something unchanging be free?
- God is said to be free to create because he creates merely by his will.
- This does not imply that God can *change* his will!



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## 4. Knowledge and Change

Cf. next week!

- Does knowing changing things imply change in the knower's mind?
- Perhaps: God can know his own nature unchangeably, and the creatures' natures also unchangeably.
- Perhaps God unchangeably knows everything that will ever happen (again, cf. next week!).

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# 5. God and God's Properties

Can God be identical with his properties?

- Plantinga: if God's properties are identical with each other, and also identical with God, then God is just a single property!
- e.g., God = goodness = omnipotence = all-knowing
- Perhaps: we can distinguish between meaning and reality (reference): 'God is good' and 'God is powerful' are made true by the same God, but they mean different things. (Analogy:  $2 * 2$  and  $2^2$ .) But does this work?

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