

# Thomas Morris on Thomistic Simplicity

- “...if there is no multiplicity of properties really had by God, it will, I think, be very hard, if not just impossible, to make sense of standard distinctions we make about God. We believe that he is necessarily powerful, but that it is only contingently true of him that he used that power to create our world. He could have created another universe instead, or, perhaps, he could have refrained from creating any physical realm at all. We also believe that it is only contingently, not necessarily, true of God that he called Abram out of Ur, spoke through Moses, and sent the prophets he chose. ...God necessarily is a knower. God contingently has the knowledge that I have on a striped shirt. Thus, there is both necessity and contingency with respect to God. And there seems to be no other good way to capture this truth than to say that God has both necessary (essential) and contingent properties. But if that is so, then he cannot 'have' just one and only one property, a single property with which he is identical.”

# Eleonore Stump defends Thomas

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- “If we can distinguish between necessitated divine acts and divine acts such that it is possible for God to have done otherwise, in what sense is there no distinction within God? It seems, on the face of it, that this analysis attributes contingency to some of God's acts. And if some divine acts are contingent, then it seems that God does have intrinsic accidental properties, properties such that God could exist and have properties other than these, contrary to the explicit claims of the doctrine of divine simplicity...”

# Stump

- Thomas "...does not take any property anything has in some but not all possible worlds in which it exists as an accident of that thing; and, on his view, a thing can be its own nature without that thing's having only properties necessary to it. ...[F]or him the denial that God has accidents does not entail that God is the same in all possible worlds in which he exists, and the claim that God is his own nature does not entail that God is necessarily whatever he is."

- “But although the differing relationships and differing counterfactuals imply that God is not the same in all possible worlds, they do not show that in any given world God's act of will is not one single metaphysically indivisible act. They provide the basis for drawing a conceptual distinction among Cambridge properties of God's will, but because the distinction arises just from considering the different ways in which the divine will can be related to its objects, they do not constitute a metaphysical distinction among God's intrinsic properties...”

# Stump on God's Responsiveness

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- “If it is the case that everything that God is and does is identical with his being, then God talking to Cain is identical with his being. If God talks to Cain, then God's talking to Cain is not part of his essence; it is his essence, and God himself is that essence. Not only so, but if God's talking to Cain is essential to God, then it is apparently necessary, and not something God could refrain from doing.”

- “As Aquinas understands it, God's willing himself and other things consists in God's willing at once, in one action, both goodness and the manifestation of goodness; and there is no special difficulty in understanding goodness to be manifested differently to different persons on different occasions...in ways that must be counted among the extrinsic accidental properties of the goodness manifested. On Aquinas's view, the multiplicity of the objects of God's will is no more in tension with his simplicity than the multitude of the objects of his knowledge is.”

## But... Brian Leftow

- “...a feature of Thomas' general modal metaphysics defeats the claim that what makes it the case the God's being  $F$  [for example,  $F = \text{Creator}$ ] is contingent is extrinsic. Thomas holds views which imply that if there "are" possible worlds, prior to all Creation, they exist "in God's power," in the strong sense that what makes talk of them true is really God's power. God's power is intrinsic to him, then if God is contingently  $F$  [e.g., Creator], the worlds which make it the case that God's being  $F$  is contingent are intrinsic to God. ...If Thomas wants to make the extrinsic-modality move, this part of his modal metaphysics stands in his way.”

# Leftow again

- “Let's ask just how a necessarily simple event can contingently fall under the description "willing creatures to exist." This description is either intrinsic or extrinsic. If intrinsic, it can't fail to apply in virtue of a difference in part or in the broader sort of constituent a Thomist accident...is. A simple event is its own only constituent. Add a part or constituent and the result is not simple, and so not that event if the event is necessarily simple. Substitute something else for the one constituent the event is and the result is not that event either. But what other than a difference in part, accident or property *could* account for an intrinsic description's applying contingently?”

- “If the same event could have taken place in a different manner, one could have the event without the manner. So event and manner can't be just identical, it seems. So mustn't there be some real distinction in God between the willing and the manner, and how is this compatible with divine simplicity? There either is or is not something in which it consists for the willing to be in the one manner or the other. If there is, it seems that that something must be there contingently and so we introduce internal complexity in a simple God. If there is not, we are no better off than we were with Stump's simple solution: we seem to solve the problem by magic...”

# Response from Stump

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- “Quantum Metaphysics”
  - *Esse* (existence)
  - *Id quod est* (essence)

# Esse

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- Nothing concrete
- "Whiteness does not have a certain size or quantity, for example; it does not engage in action or receive the action of anything else... *Whiteness is what it is — whiteness — and nothing else at all.*"

- “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.”

# Quantum Metaphysics

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- ◉ “What kind of thing is it that 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. ...Analogously, we can ask: What kind of thing is it that 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.”

# Stump

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- “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.”

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- Those who emphasize only esse not only fall prey to Plantinga's critique, but they also "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."

# Stump

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- "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."
- "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."

# Geerhardus Vos

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- One divine will, but “...this will appears as having *its own mode of existence in each person*. One cannot object to this on the basis of the unity of God’s being. To push unity so strongly that the persons can no longer be related to one another judicially would lead to Sabellianism and would undermine the reality of the entire economy of redemption with its person to person relationships.” (my emphasis)

# John Owen

- “...such is the distinction of the persons in the unity of the divine essence, as that they act in natural and essential acts *reciprocally* one towards another,—namely, in understanding, love, and the like; they know and mutually love each other. And as they subsist distinctly, so they also act distinctly in those works which are of external operation. And whereas all these acts and operations, whether reciprocal [i.e., *ad intra* or intrinsic] or external [i.e., *ad extra* or extrinsic], are either with a will or from a freedom of will and choice, the will of God in each person, as to the peculiar acts ascribed unto him, is his will therein *peculiarly and eminently*, though not exclusively to the other persons, by reason of their mutual *in-being*. The will of God as to the peculiar actings of the Father in this matter is the will of the Father, and the will of God with regard unto the peculiar actings of the Son is the will of the Son; *not by a distinction of sundry wills, but by the distinct application of the same will unto its distinct acts in the persons of the Father and the Son*. And in this respect the covenant [i.e., *pactum salutis*] whereof we treat differeth from a pure decree; for from these distinct actings of the will of God in the Father and the Son there doth arise a *new habitude or relation*, which is not natural or necessary unto them, but freely taken on them.” (my emphases)

# Herman Bavinck

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- "God's trinitarian [i.e., personal] essence is the presupposition and condition of the incarnation of God."
- "...not the divine nature as such but specifically the person of the Son became man."
- "But Reformed theology stressed that it was the person of the Son who became flesh—not the substance (the underlying reality) [esse] but the subsistence (the particular being) [the *id quod est*] of the Son assumed our nature. The unity of the two natures, despite the sharp distinction between them, *is unalterably anchored in the person.*"