

I do not deny that violence is sometimes even required by public reason and that considerably more violence is allowed by public reason, but I think there can be no doubt that the overwhelming majority of acts of violence are prohibited by public reason and thus completely unjustified.

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### THE DIVINE SIMPLICITY \*

**T**HE idea that God is One, as expressed, for example, in the Shema Yisrael: "Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One," comes in part to this: there is but one God (if there's any at all). But it also comes to this: God is a unity, not a "heap."

Insofar, God's oneness doesn't differ from the oneness of, say, legs attached to my right side; there's just one, and it's a unity, not a "heap."

However, God's uniqueness is, presumably, not accidental, whereas the uniqueness of legs on my right side is. The sense of the term 'God', supposedly, requires that there be at *most* one (as it would require that there be at *least* one, if the ontological argument in one of its forms is sound), whereas the sense of 'leg attached to my right side' does not require that there be at most one.

In that way God's uniqueness might be unique.

Is there anything unique about God's unity?

According to some theologians, God's unity is unique in that God is absolutely simple. The unity of my right leg involves its being an organization of proper parts. According to the theologians in question, God has no proper parts.

"There cannot be any belief in the unity of God except by admitting that He is one simple substance, without any composition or plurality of elements; one from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it; not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause" (Maimonides).

In this paper I want to try to clarify somewhat the idea that God is thus absolutely simple and to try to show that certain difficulties

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that might be or have been thought to follow from it can be got around, if certain dubious metaphysical assumptions are not made.<sup>1</sup>

## I

A composite thing is either a heap or an organization of proper parts.

All the parts of a heap are essential to its existence. Take away a part of a heap and you get a different thing. Heaps have no accidental parts (though they have accidental properties).

A thing which is an organization of proper parts has among its parts states or activities or episodes of the thing. Some of these states or activities or episodes of a composite organization are essential or necessary to the thing, and some of them are accidental or incidental to the thing.

A composite thing, be it a heap or an organization, is not identical with its essential parts, and its essential parts are not identical with its existence.

A simple thing is an organization of parts, parts which include states and activities and episodes of the thing, but a simple thing is *identical* with its parts. Thus, a simple thing, like a heap, has no accidents, but, unlike a heap, it is identical with its essential parts, and its essential parts are identical with its existence. A simple thing is, literally, what it has and does and undergoes.

The idea we are examining is that God is simple in that sense.

To clarify the idea we need to say something about essence or necessity, accident or contingency,<sup>2</sup> possibility, and existence or actuality, and also a little about part-whole.

1.1. There are at least five ways of ascribing necessity, possibility, and contingency:

i. *Truth*: That spinsters are unmarried is a necessary truth. That some spinsters are philosophers is a contingent truth.

ii. *Exemplification* (quantified): Deity is a property that is necessarily exemplified by something (if the ontological argument in another of its forms is sound). Humanity is a property that is contingently exemplified by something. Being a physical entity is a property that is possibly exemplified by everything.

<sup>1</sup> There are difficulties with the view that God is absolutely simple which I think cannot be got round, but which I won't consider in this paper. I am mostly interested here in exposing some of the metaphysical machinery needed to discuss the topic.

<sup>2</sup> There are differences between essence and necessity and between accident and contingency which I won't examine in this paper, but which I have discussed in "Essential Properties," this JOURNAL, LXVI, 5 (Aug. 7, 1969): 487-499.

iii. *Empropertyment*: Being human is a necessary property of Socrates. Sitting is a contingent property of Socrates.

iv. *Existence*: God and properties are (according to the usual views) necessary beings; i.e., if they exist at all they are imperishable. Socrates is a contingent being.

v. *For the existence of—*: Socrates' humanity is necessary for his existence. His wisdom is contingent for his existence, i.e., is an accident of his.

Necessity, possibility, and contingency ascribed in the first three ways are "modalities." Type i modalities are *de dicto*. Type iii modalities are *de re*. Type ii modalities are modalities *in sensu composito*. Type iii modalities are modalities *in sensu diviso*. This classification is based only on surface features of the ascriptions. I will not discuss their interpretation in this paper.<sup>3</sup>

Necessity, possibility, and contingency, when they are ascribed in the last two ways, are (fragments of) properties of individuals. Being a necessary being is the property of imperishability or omnitemporality. A contingent being is a perishable being or one that comes to be or passes away. Type v are relational properties. They sometimes relate an individual and its states, activities, or episodes. The essence of a thing is a state or activity or episode of it necessary to its existence. An accident of a thing is a state or activity or episode of it contingent (incidental) to its existence.

It is a necessary truth that (type i ascription) if there are properties, they are necessary beings. The property of being red would (on the hypothesis) be a necessary being (type iv ascription) which is contingently exemplified by something (type ii ascription) and which is a contingent property of a certain rose (type iii ascription). Further, the redness of the rose is not necessary to the existence of the rose (type v ascription), and the rose itself is a contingent being (type iv ascription).

The property of being a rose would be a necessary being (type iv) which is contingently exemplified (type ii), but which is a necessary property of a certain rose (type iii). Further, the roseness of the rose is necessary to the existence of the rose (type v), though the rose itself is a contingent being (type iv).

The property of Deity would be a necessary being (type iv) which is necessarily exemplified (type ii) and which (on the orthodox view) is a necessary property of what exemplifies it (God) (type iii). Fur-

<sup>3</sup> I have proposed an extensional interpretation of type iii ascriptions in "Essential Properties," *op. cit.*

ther (orthodoxly) the Deity of God is necessary to Him (type v), and He is a necessary being (type iv).<sup>4</sup>

Are the redness of the rose, the roseness of the rose, the Deity of God identical or not with (respectively) the property of redness, the property of being a rose, and the property of Deity? I'll return to this question later. It is fundamental to the topic of Divine Simplicity.

1.2. Can ways comparable to the five ways of ascribing necessity, possibility, and contingency be made out for existence or actuality?

i. *Truth* is the expression of the idea of actuality or existence *de dicto*.

ii. *Exemplification* (i.e., having *instances*) is the expression of the idea of actuality or existence *in sensu composito*.

iii. *EmpROPERTYment* (i.e., having *properties*) is the expression of the idea of actuality or existence *in sensu diviso* or *de re*.

What about type iv and v ascription?

The property of existence belonging to Socrates may be either the property of self-identity or the property of being identical with Socrates. Self-identity is a transcendental property, i.e., fails to sort a thing of which it is true from anything; and being identical with Socrates is an individuating property, i.e., sorts Socrates from everything. I don't think it matters much which of these we decide on. Each of them, like the property of being a contingent being, is a necessary property of Socrates (in the type iii manner).

iv. *Self-identity* (either as common or as peculiar) is the expression of the idea of existence or actuality as a property of things.

The existence of Socrates, his *esse*, is his total biography or life, i.e., the whole space-time slab which is the Socrates-event. This event has events as parts. It is itself a contingent being (in type iv sense) which has elements some of which are necessary to it and some of which are contingent to it (in type v sense). Socrates' essence, if it is a state or activity or episode of Socrates, is a necessary part of his *esse*, but his wisdom or justice are contingent to his *esse*.

Since it has accidental parts, Socrates' *esse* is an accident of Socrates.

<sup>4</sup> There are theologies which imply that the property of Deity, though perhaps itself a necessary being, is contingently exemplified, and/or is a contingent property of what exemplifies it, and/or is exemplified in contingent beings. S. Alexander and other emergentist theologians, as well as some Buddhists, seem to hold that Deity is an accident of contingent beings. An emergentist or Buddhist may yet believe that the property of Deity is necessarily exemplified and, thus, accept the ontological argument in one of its forms. I have argued all this in "Deity and Events," this JOURNAL, LXIV, 24 (Dec. 21, 1967): 815-824.

v. The *esse* of a thing is the expression of the idea of actuality or existence as a relation of the thing and its states or activities or episodes.

1.3. Spatial concreta (physical objects, substances) sometimes have spatial concreta as proper parts. If there are spatial concreta that don't have spatial concreta as parts, they are old-style atoms.

Temporal concreta (events) sometimes have temporal concreta as proper parts. If there are temporal concreta that don't have temporal concreta as proper parts, they are newer-style atoms (?).

Spatial abstracta (points, lines, planes, solids, etc.) sometimes have spatial abstracta as parts. Points are spatially abstract atoms.

Temporal abstracta (instants, durations) sometimes have temporal abstracta as parts. Instants are temporally abstract atoms.

Nonspatiotemporal abstracta (properties, propositions, classes, etc.) sometimes have nonspatiotemporal abstracta as parts. For example, classes contain other classes.

Things get aporetic when we feel the pressure to stretch part-whole across categories.

Are abstracta parts of concreta?

Especially:

- a. Are spatiotemporal abstracta parts of spatiotemporal concreta?
- b. Are nonspatiotemporal abstracta (especially properties) parts of concreta?

These aporia are as old as metaphysics.<sup>5</sup> I have assumed in this paper that temporal concreta, including states, activities, and episodes of spatial concreta, are parts of spatial concreta. The *crucial* question in discussing Divine Simplicity is:

b'. Are properties parts of concreta?

If they are, and God is a simple concretum, He is unintelligible.

## II

That God is simple is equivalent to any one of the following four propositions:

1. God is identical with His essence.
2. God's essence is identical with His esse.
3. God has no accidents; i.e., every state or activity or episode of God is necessary to His existence.
4. Every state or activity or episode of God is identical with God, and so is identical with every other state or activity or episode of God.

<sup>5</sup> In Beta, *Metaphysica*, Aristotle wonders about the connections between (i) concreta (substances) and (ii) intermediaries (mathematicals), which include spatial abstracta, and (iii) genera and species, i.e., nonspatiotemporal abstracta.

So, if the Deity of God is His essence, then:

1'. The Deity of God is identical with God.

And, if the esse of God is His life or biography, then:

2'. The Deity of God is identical with the life of God.

If, say, God's knowledge of what I will eat for breakfast is a state of God's, then:

3'. God's knowledge of what I will eat for breakfast is necessary to God's existence.

And, on the same assumption, then:

4'. God's knowledge of what I will have for breakfast is identical with the Deity of God. And, if God's knowledge of what you had for lunch is a state of God's, then it is identical with His knowledge of what I'll have for breakfast, and both are identical with God!

I will not comment on these consequences in this paper.<sup>6</sup>

II.1. We should now return to the question we deferred, i.e., Are the redness of the rose, its roseness, and the Deity of God properties or not?

More generally put:

Are the states, activities, and episodes of a thing properties of the thing?

Let us assume that they are, and see what becomes of the idea that God is simple.

If the redness of the rose is identical with the property of redness, then the redness of the rose is identical with the redness of someone's nose. The redness of the rose becomes "one over many" and a necessary being. Also, on the assumption, the contingency of the redness of the rose to the existence of the rose is just the property of redness being a contingent property of the rose. Similarly, the necessity of the roseness of the rose to its existence is just the property of being a rose being a necessary property of the rose.<sup>7</sup>

In general, if states (or activities or episodes) are properties, then states contingent to a thing (accidents) are contingent properties, and states necessary to a thing (including essences) are necessary

<sup>6</sup> It is consequences like 3' and 4' which Hume thought indicative of the unacceptability of the view that God both is simple and has a mind. "A mind, whose acts and sentiments and ideas are not distinct and successive; one, that is wholly simple, and totally immutable, is a mind which has no thought, no reason, no will, no sentiment, no love, no hatred; or, in a word, is no mind at all" (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, sec. 578). A determination of whether or not Hume is right would require clarification of identity conditions for mental states, activities, and episodes.

<sup>7</sup> This is the view that Aristotle considers in *Zeta*, which identifies the *to ti en enai*, the "what it is to be," of a thing, with the universal, the Platonic Form (*Metaphysica*, 1038b-1039b, 19).

properties. That is, type v ascriptions of necessity and contingency would just be type iii ascriptions.

The esse of a thing, on the assumptions, becomes the totality of properties true of the thing.

God's simplicity on the assumption now looks like this:

1". God is identical with the properties necessarily (or essentially) true of Him.

2". The properties necessarily true of God are identical with the totality of properties true of Him.

3". Every property of God is a necessary property of Him.

4". Every property of God is identical with God.

The assumption that the states (or activities or episodes) of a thing are properties, and the view that God is simple, lead to the consequence that God is a property! This is devastating to commonly held views about God.

A. If God has no accidents in the sense now given the claim, i.e., whatever properties He has, He necessarily has, as 3" says, then, e.g., God necessarily elects Abraham. He necessarily wills what He wills. This is Spinozism.

If being referred to by me is a property of God's, then, according to 3", it is a necessary property of God's. Thus, 3" leads to a kind of Idealism.

B. If God is identical with His properties, as 4" says, then the properties He has are identical with one another. Thus, if Wisdom and Justice and Mercy are different properties, then God can't have more than one of these properties. But, if He has the property of Oneness, and Oneness is a different property from Wisdom, Justice, and Mercy, He can't be either wise or just or merciful!

Further, if existence is a property (say, self-identity) and if it is a different property from Oneness, then if God is One He can't also exist! He must be "above existence." This is the *via negativa* with a vengeance. 4" seems to be the metaphysical basis for Pseudo-Dionysianism. On the assumptions, God becomes a self-participating property . . . the highest sort of being for Platonizers.

Incidentally, if God is identical with His properties, then He is a property, and if He is the property of Oneness, He is a transcendental property, i.e., a property that fails to sort a thing of which it is true from anything whatsoever. Thus, Pseudo-Dionysianism provides an efficient, if weird, account of God's universal providence. God becomes provident by being true of everything, including Himself!

C. If God is identical with all His properties, then He is identical with His essential properties, and all His properties must be essential properties, and, since there is just one of Him, there is just one property of Him.

It is a commonly held view that God is unknowable in His essence. We may put this idea as follows:

There is some property which is an essential property of God, but which we (composite beings) cannot know to be a property of Him.

That, as it stands, is an intelligible idea if the idea of essential property is intelligible, but, combined with the assumptions that God is simple and that states, activities, or episodes are properties, it makes God completely unknowable.

On the assumptions, we can know *no* property to be true of God, not even the property of having at least one property; not even the property of being referred to by me.

This is the Dark Night of Theology.

I think we have made enough trouble.

11.2. The difficulties come from the assumptions that God is simple and that states, activities, and episodes are properties. Is there any independent reason for rejecting the latter assumption? I think there is.

a. Falling downstairs and making someone laugh are different properties, each of which may belong to more than one episode. My falling downstairs yesterday and your falling downstairs today are both instances of one and the same property (this is usually put in terms of descriptions. My way of speaking is material mode for that).

The set of episodes that are fallings downstairs and the set of episodes that are makings of someone to laugh are not identical sets. There are fallings that make no one laugh and makings to laugh that are not fallings. However, a *particular* falling may be just what makes you laugh.

Just as, though the property of being a morning star and being an evening star are not identical, the morning star is the evening star, so, though the property of falling and making laugh are not identical, a falling may be a making laugh.

b. The property of redness is not identical with the property of coloredness (though it may be in some sense part of it), but the redness of her cheeks and the coloredness of her cheeks are identical.

The redness of her cheeks, unlike the property of redness, may spread and may fade.

The redness of her cheeks may be caused by an episode. It may be identical with various activities of capillaries.<sup>8</sup>

If we treat the states, activities, and episodes of a thing as concreta, we need not be constrained by the identity conditions which hold for properties when making such a claim as that, e.g., God's wisdom is His justice, any more than we are when we make such a claim as that, e.g., my falling down is the thing that made you laugh, or, e.g., my headache is a certain brain state. Concreta are terms in spatial, temporal, and/or causal relations. Being a term of such relations is (it seems likely) a necessary property of concreta. Thus, the identity conditions for concreta are functions of these relata, and not of the necessary properties of abstracta.

If states, etc., are not properties, we can get round the difficulties A, B, and C.

A'. It does not follow from the assumption that God has no accidental *states* that there are no properties accidentally true of Him. Thus, God might have the accidental property of being referred to by me or of having chosen Abraham, and not be in an accidental state corresponding to the property. There are, of course, cases where, when a property is accidentally true of an individual, the individual is in a corresponding accidental state. Thus, when Socrates is accidentally wise, there is part of his life which is his wisdom. But we needn't hold that there is always such a correspondence, if type iii and type v attributions are kept distinct.

B'. We needn't hold that God is identical with His properties, though we hold He is identical with His states, activities, and episodes. The wisdom of God and the justice of God and the mercy of God are not identical with the properties of Wisdom, Justice, and Mercy, respectively. We may then hold that, though a plurality of properties is true of God, nevertheless, there is not in Him a corresponding plurality of states.

God's uniqueness needn't be thought of as a function of a weirdness in His manner of instantiating properties. God might be wise and just in *exactly* the way and sense in which Socrates is wise and

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas argues as follows, roughly, in chapter 2 of *De Ente et Essentia*: Being rational and Being animal are not identical considered as genus and difference, i.e., as abstracta, but they are identical in a particular man. This is the same sort of argument that I've sketched for the accident of color, but applied to essence.

just. The uniqueness should be this: In the case of Socrates, because he is a composite, the properties of wisdom and justice correspond to and are exemplified in different states, but in the case of God they correspond to and are exemplified in the same state, which is God Himself. That's weird enough.

C'. There is no inconsistency in holding both that there is a property that is an essential property of God known only to Him and that we know a great deal about God, including some things which are necessarily true of Him, as well as some things which are contingently true of Him; that is, once the assumption that states, etc. are properties is given up.

That God has an unknown essential property is not unlike the idea that subatomic particles have an unknown essential property. To know the essence of a thing is to know the properties that sort it necessarily from other things. The only thing we *might* know about subatomic particles is that they are causal terms needed to account for certain manifest concreta. The difference would be that it is only a contingent ignorance in the case of subatomic concreta, whereas it is a necessary ignorance in the case of God.

### III

Maimonides' point was that God can't have *any* parts. There seems to be no serious difficulty in maintaining some of the familiar views about God together with the view that God *is* His parts, so long as the parts we are considering are concreta.<sup>9</sup> But a doubt remains. Suppose states, activities, and episodes are not properties; mightn't properties still be parts of concreta?

There is some pressure to hold that states, activities, and episodes are parts of Socrates, for the assumption enables us to account for his *unity*. Just as there is some pressure to say that a concretum like Socrates is part of an abstractum like the class of philosophers, because that enables us to account for the *unity* of the class. A pressure, then, for holding that properties are parts of things like Socrates would be the assumption's helping to account for his unity. There *is* a philosophical tendency that seeks such an account, i.e., the Platonizing tendency, but that is in conflict with seeking the account in terms of concrete parts.

In other words, properties should be taken to be parts of concreta if and only if concrete states, activities, and episodes should not.

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<sup>9</sup> There is, of course, Hume's objection, noted earlier.