

A THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL DEFENSE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY AGAINST THE CRITICISMS OF WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

Introduction

Divine simplicity means that in God's mode of being there is no composition of any kind. God cannot break down or *de-compose* (i.e., He is indivisible), for there is no composition in His being. Since there is no composition in His being, He needs no composer. God is the "end-all" and "be-all" of all that is composed. Thomistic scholar Walter Farrell notes, "To say that God is simple means, in the concrete, that He is in no sense composite."¹ Composition includes, but is not limited to, material beings – spiritual beings may be composed also. Thus, divine simplicity is an expression about God's mode of existence. While simplicity has enjoyed creedal status since the dawn of Christianity, it has fallen out of favor with Christian philosophers and theologians over the past century. So while simplicity has had an illustrious past, the question arises "does simplicity have a future?"

This project seeks to explore that question. The first task is to establish whether or not there is any theological and philosophical reason to support belief in the doctrine of simplicity. The second undertaking will be to assess popular criticisms of the doctrine and evaluate if they have any merit. This project will primarily focus in on the criticisms adopted by Christian philosopher and theologian William Lane Craig. His works are influential within the Christian community and he is seen by many as an authority on multiple topics. Since his influence is so

¹Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa*, vol. 1, *The Architect of the Universe* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1952), 59.

broad his criticisms deserve particular care and attention. Does Craig make a convincing case *against* divine simplicity?²

A Theological Defense of Divine Simplicity

It is well known that divine simplicity is a philosophical construction of some virtue. However, the question emerges: is there any biblical data that can be used in support for the doctrine? Craig thinks not, “The doctrines of divine simplicity and immutability . . . find absolutely no support in Scripture, which at most speaks of God’s immutability in terms of His faithfulness and unchanging character (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17).”³ He reiterates, “[Simplicity] is a radical doctrine that enjoys no biblical support and even is at odds with the biblical conception of God in various ways.”⁴ While it will be discussed below if the doctrine of simplicity is “at odds” with a biblical conception of God, is Craig correct that the Bible has nothing to say on this topic?

Biblical Data

Much like the doctrine of the Trinity, the Bible does not directly explain divine

²Criticisms have been gathered from several of Craig’s works, but in each work he tends to give the same arguments worded almost exactly the same. Several of the criticisms were co-written with Paul Copan and J. P. Moreland. However, I will refer to these references as Craig’s criticisms since he alone has written them elsewhere. Craig’s analysis shows a reliance of the work of Alvin Plantinga, Christopher Hughes, and Thomas Morris. For their arguments see Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980); Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

³William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 31.

⁴J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 524.

simplicity. However, like the Trinity, simplicity can be inferred by surveying the biblical data and harmonizing it. If Craig objects to doing this with divine simplicity, then one need remind him that the Bible speaks nothing of God's middle, free, and natural knowledge which is needed to develop the doctrine of Molinism to which Craig holds.⁵ It is doubtful that Craig would object to the project, but only that the conclusion to the survey would show divine simplicity is the case. What, then, does the survey reveal?

The Bible is emphatic that there is only one God. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4).⁶ "For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God" (Psalm 86:10). "I am the LORD, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:18). "For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me" (Isa. 46:9). "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the *one and only* God?" (John 5:44). "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God" (John 17:3). "We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world and that there is no god but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). "For there is one God" (1 Tim. 2:5). "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). These verses obviously counteract the polytheistic context in which the prophets spoke. These are overt claims that no other god or gods exist.

Though the Bible uses anthropomorphisms, it is emphatic that God is immaterial. "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to

⁵For a contemporary elaboration of Molinism see William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000).

⁶All Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard* unless otherwise noted.

heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there” (Psalm 139:7). “God is spirit” (John 4:24). “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17-18). The reason Israel was not to make any “graven image” (Exod. 20:4-6) was because God is Spirit and any material object would be incapable of capturing His essence, hence, images are demeaning to Him.

Further, the Bible declares that God is self-existent. “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’” (Exod. 3:14). “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me’” (Isa. 44:6). “But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King” (Jer. 10:10). “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (John 5:26). “Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:25). “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17). Since God never came *into* existence (i.e., He has always *been*) He cannot go *out of* existence.

Craig thinks that biblical support for divine immutability is lacking, suggesting that any reference to God’s unchangeableness is simply a reference to God’s unchanging moral character.⁷ But is the biblical text limited to only God’s character as unchanging? And if it is,

⁷Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 31.

would that prove Craig's point? In regards to the latter – it seems not. Even if the biblical text only used the immutable passages in a sense that denoted only unchanging character it would still remain to be proven that God could change in His being.⁸ Other passages or arguments would need to be cited in order to prove the point. In regards to the former – the biblical text does not seem to be limited only to God's faithfulness or character (though it most certainly does include these). "The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Sam. 15:29).⁹ "As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tested" (2 Sam. 22:31). "But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end" (Psalm 102:27). "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:17-18). "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadows" (James 1:17). From these passages it can be established that God does not lie, does not change His mind, is blameless (i.e., perfect), and remains the same.

Taking the above data several implications seem to follow. If God is perfect, then can He change? It seems not, for to change is to either gain or lose a perfection, but this seems impossible for one who is already perfect. A single spiritual Being that is self-existent and perfect cannot change in any manner. This Being cannot go out of existence, nor come into existence. Since this Being cannot change, this hints at what is meant by divine simplicity.

⁸For a Thomist it is a meaningless question to separate God's character from His being. If God's character (i.e., goodness) is unchanging, so too is God (see *Summa Theologica* I. 5. 1; 6. 1)!

⁹If this passage is interpreted by a Thomist and God's mind (i.e., intellect, see *Summa Theologica* I. 14. 6) is His nature, then God's nature is unchangeable – but this seems to be the very interpretation in question.

Again, if this Being could change, then it would be to acquire some perfection or imperfection. But the perfect Being acquires nothing, for it already has all it needs in its own self-existence. This leads Farrell to conclude, “God is simple because He is the *first*, the completely *independent* source of all being.”¹⁰ Maximally, divine simplicity may be arrived at from the biblical data – though admittedly not directly. Minimally, there is nothing in the Bible that contradicts divine simplicity, and there is much that justifies it.

Historical Data¹¹

Perhaps the most interesting (if not disturbing) aspect of the modern abandonment of divine simplicity is that it is at odds with the entire history of the Christian Church. Since the Church’s inception, God’s indivisibility and unique oneness have been formally held. Any teaching that goes against the uniform teaching of the history of the Church is certainly subject to scrutiny. Admonishing the Church fathers as unthinking, uncritical, and unlearned seems certainly inappropriate. To my knowledge Craig has never claimed this of the Church fathers, though others have (such as Emil Brunner and Charles Hodge).¹² It is admitted that time is not a test for truth. It is entirely possible that a uniform teaching can be wrong. However, some of the greatest minds the world has ever known have held to this doctrine. Why? To say they uncritically accepted what was passed down is clearly inadequate – a brief survey of the history of church controversies would prove the point that they were *not* uncritical. A more likely

¹⁰Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa*, 59 (emphasis in original).

¹¹For a survey of historical quotes related to divine simplicity see Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 44-50.

¹²See Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 214, n8.

explanation for the disconnect is a difference in the conception of who (or what) God is for the ancients than for the modern philosopher and theologian. Did the ancients know something that moderns do not, or have moderns advanced beyond the point, philosophically, that they can no longer hold to the view of the world or God of the ancients? This is more of a philosophical than historical question – so to the philosophical data we turn.

A Philosophical Defense of Divine Simplicity

Part of the problem in discussing the debate over divine simplicity is disagreement on the use of vocabulary. Modern usage of terms such as nature and essence seem to take on a different connotation than they did for the ancients. In fact, at least four differences can be ascertained: 1) contemporary notions of nature do not account for *what* a thing is at it did for the ancients; 2) contemporary notions of nature individuate a thing *necessarily* but it did not for the ancients; 3) contemporary notions of nature *differentiates* individuals, but for the ancients it was what was common; and 4) contemporary notions of nature rely on an *amalgamation of properties* which the ancients did not employ.¹³

At one point Craig admits this difference, “Medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas avoided this untoward implication [to make God’s essence a property] because they did not think of essences or natures as abstract objects but as concrete constituents of things. But on the present view essences are properties, construed as abstract objects. All God’s properties are said to be identical with one another, and God is said to be identical to the single, simple property

¹³Max Herrera, “Does God Have a Nature: Problems in Plantinga,” *Christian Apologetics Journal* 3, no. 2, (2004): 53.

that is his essence. But if God just is omnipotence and is goodness and is omniscience and so on, then God is not a substance and, in particular, not a personal agent.”¹⁴ The implication of this is that since God *is* a personal agent, then this particular understanding of divine simplicity must be incorrect. However, the notion of simplicity that Craig argues against in this paragraph is admittedly *not* the notion of simplicity that Aquinas holds. Craig acknowledges Aquinas has a different understanding of essence, but then criticizes a view of simplicity Aquinas does not defend. At best it is only a criticism of any form of simplicity that holds to a modified form of Platonism – whatever that is, it is not Thomistic. For Craig’s argument to succeed in this instance he must show how Aquinas held – explicitly or implicitly – to this modified form of Platonic realism where properties are construed as abstract objects.

Even if Craig succeeded in this endeavor it would still not answer the question as to why the ancients held to divine simplicity. Particularly for Aquinas, simplicity is a necessary outworking in the metaphysical enterprise. That is, simplicity follows necessarily from the metaphysical nature of reality. The metaphysical nature of reality can be found in his arguments known as the five ways.¹⁵ For this discussion the first three are of particular importance.

The Argument

The first way is the argument from motion, the second is the argument from efficient causality, and the third is the argument from possibility and necessity. After reviewing each of

¹⁴Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 178.

¹⁵The only truly philosophical work that Aquinas penned was *On Being and Essence*, but for the purposes of this project to show divine simplicity we will focus the study to his theological works.

the arguments one is left with a beginning notion of the term “God.” Not only are the arguments themselves important, but also the extent to which Aquinas uses the conclusions of each argument. That is, to understand Aquinas’ view on the five ways, it is incumbent on the researcher to evaluate and consider how Aquinas refers to the arguments in the rest of his works.

The argument from motion put in outline form looks as follows:¹⁶

1. Some things are in motion¹⁷
2. What is in motion is put in motion by another
 - 2a. A thing moves inasmuch as it is in act
 - 2b. Potentiality limits the motion to its type of act
 - 2c. Motion is the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality
 - 2d. Only something in a state of actuality can reduce something from potentiality to actuality
 - 2e. The same thing cannot be both in actuality and potentiality in the same respect (this would be a contradiction)
 - 2f. It is impossible that something in the same respect and same way should move itself
3. If what is in motion was put in motion by another, then this too was put in motion by another
4. This cannot be an infinite regress
 - 4a. If there were no first mover then no motion would take place now
5. Thus, there must be a first mover who is unmoved

The argument from efficient causality looks as follows:

1. Efficient causality takes place
2. No thing can be the efficient cause of itself
 - 2a. For it would need to be prior to itself which is a contradiction
3. There cannot be an infinite regress of efficient causes
 - 3a. Efficient causes follow in order: the efficient cause is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate cause (whether it is one or many) is the cause of an ultimate (or latest) cause
 - 3b. To remove the cause is to remove the effect
 - 3c. Thus, to remove the efficient cause is to remove the intermediate causes (which

¹⁶From Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I. 2. 3. The following outlines are from my own readings of Aquinas’ five ways, any mistakes are attributable to myself and not necessarily Aquinas.

¹⁷It seems that Aquinas understood “motion” as “change” of any kind as discussed below.

are effects of the efficient cause)

4. If there were an infinite regress of efficient causes, then there would be no first efficient cause, intermediate cause, or ultimate cause (i.e., effect)
 - 4a. This is plainly false
5. Thus, there is a first efficient cause

The argument from possibility and necessity is as follows:

1. There are things that are possible to be and not to be (i.e., exist)
 - 1a. Things that are possible not to be are generated and corruptible
 - 1b. Thus, they are possible beings
2. Possible beings cannot have always existed
 - 2a. That which is possible not to be (exist) at some time is not (i.e., did not exist, or does not have existence as an *intrinsic* quality)
 - 2b. Thus, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence
 - 2c. If there were at one time nothing in existence, then nothing would exist now
 - 2d. That which does not exist can only be brought into existence by something in existence
 - 2e. If nothing ever existed, then nothing now would exist (which is absurd)
 - 2f. Thus, not all beings are possible some are necessary
3. A necessary being has its necessity caused by another or not
 - 3a. There cannot be an infinite regress of necessary beings that are caused by another (see the argument on efficient causality)
4. Thus, there is some being that has its necessity not from another, but in itself

After reviewing the arguments Farrell comments, “The most obvious implication from the proofs for the existence of God is that God is in no sense a composite or complex being; He is wholly simple.”¹⁸ Why does Farrell (and Aquinas for that matter) come to this conclusion? Craig argues that the first way of Aquinas is merely physical and any other interpretation is forcing Aquinas (or at least the argument) to say something he is not.¹⁹ Why do Thomists feel the compulsion to take the first way metaphysically (the next two ways are clearly metaphysical)?

¹⁸Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa*, 57.

¹⁹William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument: From Plato to Leibniz* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1980; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 161-75.

Thomists feel the need to take the first way metaphysically because Aquinas does. Aquinas uses the terminology of act and potency (found only in the first way), which supposedly is only physical according to Craig, and he applies those terms *metaphysically* of God. For example, Aquinas says “The first being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality. For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to the actuality; nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced into actuality only by some being in actuality. . . . It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality.”²⁰ Is this to be taken only physically? It seems not, since Aquinas appears to have in mind *all* of reality which is more than physical motion. In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Aquinas remarks on his understanding of act and potency, “potency and actuality are referred in most cases to things in motion, because motion is the actuality of a being in potency. But the principle aim of this branch of science [i.e., metaphysics] is to consider potency and actuality, not insofar as they are found in mobile beings, but insofar as they accompany being in general. Hence potency and actuality are also found in immobile beings, for example, in intellectual ones.”²¹ That is, act and potency are not limited to physical motion. Further, Aquinas specifically refers to the five ways when he states “we have shown (Q. 2, A. 3) that God is pure act, without any potentiality.”²² This pure act without any potentiality is precisely what is meant by divine simplicity. In relating the second way (which is metaphysical) and the first way (which is supposedly only physical)

²⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I. 3. 1.

²¹Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, 1770.

²²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I. 3. 2.

Aquinas connects existence and essence to act and potency when he states, “Existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality, as shown above (A. 1), it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence.”²³ Thus, God is His own act of existence. It is, therefore, hard to agree with Craig that Aquinas understood the first way as merely physical in nature.

Nevertheless, Craig argues that “Aquinas gives no indication to the reader that he intends his version [of the first way] to be taken in any different light than those of his predecessors [i.e., physically].”²⁴ That is, Aquinas’ first way is strictly about physical motion. This seems to throw doubt on the previous analysis of the first way. However, in light of Aquinas’ use of the terminology and reference to the first way in other articles it seems difficult to agree with Craig that Aquinas *only* understood the first way physically – *even if* this is all the first way proves! Indeed, Aquinas’ use of the first way to prove metaphysical points and his stated understanding of act and potency commenting on Aristotle argues against a purely physical reading of the text. It is this reading of the text that leads Farrell to conclude, “The being who has no potentialities, but only pure actuality, who is the source of all potentiality, alone escapes the stigma of imperfection and is free of the basic element of complexity. This being is utterly, completely simple.”²⁵ Composite things are composed of act and potency. In order to be *one* thing, one *part* must be related to another *part* as potency to act (two acts do not make one act). But since God

²³Ibid., I. 3. 4.

²⁴Craig, *The Cosmological Argument: From Plato to Leibniz*, 166.

²⁵Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa*, 58.

has no potency, then He is pure act. Thus, God is not composed (i.e., He is simple).²⁶ The question arises, however, is there good reason to think that the act/potency model of reality is appropriate and adequate?

Metaphysical Reality

Philosopher Henry B. Veatch observes that for Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics “the act-potency distinction is a basic pervasive category. Things as we know them in the everyday world of common-sense reality are at once universally and radically subject to change.”²⁷ What is this act/potency relationship? Veatch explains, “Any and all . . . potentialities are correlated with actualities.”²⁸ That is, actuality precedes potentiality in the order of ontology, but potentiality limits actuality to the type of act that it is.²⁹ Act is *esse*, it is the act of existence. Potency, is simply what limits the act of existence. Thus, an acorn has only the potential to be an oak tree, not a horse. But its *act* of being an acorn precedes its potentiality as an acorn.

Potentiality is the limiting factor on act. As such, act and potency are learned together and in relation together, but are really distinct.³⁰ Potentiality does not exist in itself, only when it is joined with something in act. And act, if it is limited, is limited by some potentiality.

²⁶George Klubertanz and Maurice Holloway, *Being and God* (Publisher unknown; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, date unknown), 322-23.

²⁷Henry B. Veatch, *For an Ontology of Morals: A Critique of Contemporary Ethical Theory* (Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 107.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 107.

²⁹Note the parallel thought in *Summa Theologica*, I. 3. 1.

³⁰Klubertanz and Holloway, *Being and God*, 127.

However, if this is the case, then in the world of our experience we must conclude that act and potency are not beings in themselves, but are principles of being.³¹ For if they were both beings themselves

then one being composed of act and potency would be two beings – which is a contradiction. This leads to a basic metaphysical principle: act in the order in which it is act, is unlimited in itself unless conjoined with passive potency.³² There is nothing that limits the act of running *except* the potency of the runner that is running. A pianist is limited by their potential, but there is nothing in the playing a piano itself that is limited (other than material potency) – this is why two pianists can perform a “fuller” piece than a single pianists. Two pianists are not limited to just ten fingers, but they are limited to twenty fingers. But act – in and of itself – is not limited. God as pure act is unlimited, unique, and not joined to passive potency – thus, He is simple. Anyone that rejects this act/potency model must replace it with a satisfactory account of change, which is no easy task.

Objections to Divine Simplicity

There are many objections against divine simplicity some are of a popular level (see Appendix One) others are more academic. Yet if any one cannot be answered, then it throws doubt on the notion that God is not composed. What follows is a collection of arguments against

³¹Ibid., 131.

³²Ibid., 132.

divine simplicity compiled from the works of William Lane Craig.³³

Objections Posed By William Lane Craig

Analogy Is Inadequate

Thomists argue that the attributes and names we ascribe to God must be understood analogically. Indeed, since God is infinite and man is finite, the Thomist argues that no univocal God talk is possible. Further, equivocal God talk leaves one in agnosticism, since the same term applied to God and man would have nothing in common. Thus, analogical God talk is the only alternative. However, Craig asserts, “[the Thomist argues] while we can say what God is not like, we cannot say what he is like, except in an analogical sense. But these predications must in the end fail, since there is no univocal element in the predicates we assign to God, leaving us in a state of genuine agnosticism about the nature of God.”³⁴ Is Craig correct? Does the doctrine of simplicity mean we are left in agnosticism about God’s nature, because analogy is inadequate to convey information about God?

It seems not. Craig misstates the nature of analogy. Unfortunately, this is the only passage that he discusses the nature of analogy, hence any analysis on this point will be limited. However, his sole reason for rejecting analogy appears to be that there is no univocal element.

³³Again, these criticisms have been gathered from several of Craig’s works, but in each work he tends to give the same arguments worded almost exactly the same. Several of the criticisms were co-written with Paul Copan and J. P. Moreland. However, I will refer to these references as Craig’s criticisms since he alone has written them elsewhere.

³⁴Moreland and Craig, 524.

But is that what analogy states? No. Analogy holds a univocal definition that is applied *analogically*.³⁵ “Good” means exactly the same for God and man, but man’s goodness is different than God’s goodness. Man’s goodness is limited and finite, but God’s goodness is unlimited and infinite. This is neither univocal nor equivocal – it is analogical. The definition is the same, but the predication is analogical. Thus, Craig’s rejection of analogy is not really a rejection of analogy – it is a rejection of an incorrect view of analogy. Craig essentially equates analogy with equivocity and declares it is inadequate.

The Argument From Contingency and Necessity Fails

Dealing with the third way of Aquinas Craig remarks, “Thomas Aquinas’s famous argument for God from contingent beings (beings whose essence is distinct from their existence) leads at best, I think, to a being whose essence is such that it is necessarily instantiated, a metaphysically necessary being.”³⁶ That is, Aquinas seems to make his own arguments say something they do not. Therefore, Craig concludes that Thomas’ cosmological argument, “need not commit us to divine simplicity.”³⁷ This analysis has several problems.

First, as shown above, it is *precisely* because of the conclusion of the five ways that leads Aquinas to divine simplicity. If God is pure act, then how is that not simple? Craig offers no answer or alternative. Second, in light of the first way, the third way leads not only to a metaphysically necessary being, but this being must be simple, for essence is proportioned to

³⁵Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena and Bibliology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), 137-58.

³⁶Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 31, n3.

³⁷Moreland and Craig, 524.

existence as act is proportioned to potentiality. However, according to the first way God is pure act, and if act is proportioned to existence, then God *is* existence. As Aquinas stated, “Existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality.

Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality, as shown above (A. 1), it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence.”³⁸ And if God is existence, then He is necessary. In fact, He is the *only* necessary being. Finally, if Craig accepts the validity of Aquinas’ arguments, then it is difficult to understand his “metaphysically necessary being” as not being simple. This seems to be a case of accepting the argument, but denying the conclusion.

Distinct Properties Prove God Is Composite

At this point the main objections to simplicity begin to emerge. God is thought to have different properties or qualities, such as goodness, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. But how can these distinct properties exist as one in God? Craig argues, “To say that God does not have distinct properties seems patently false: Omnipotence is not the same property as goodness, for a being may have one and not the other.”³⁹ He adds, “In some mysterious way His omnipotence is His goodness.”⁴⁰ Why have theologians held to simplicity based on issues so obviously false?

First, many things can be true of one and the same object. Since, no single attribute or property conveys *all* of God’s nature, we need many attributes to apprehend the divine mode of

³⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I. 3. 4.

³⁹Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 31, n3.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 30.

existence. No finite concept exhausts the knowledge of God.⁴¹ Second, this objection is valid only if the attributes of God are understood univocally. That is, the attributes are existing independently as self contained entities apart from each other. If they are understood analogically, then there is no difficulty. Finally, “In God the absolute and the relative do not differ really, but only logically.”⁴² That is, these attributes are distinctions of reason and not real distinctions in God. Thus, God’s essence *is* omnipotent, omniscient, and good by a simple mode of being – but these attributes are different in our conception of them, yet they are not distinct in God who is one. Craig’s mistake is that he separates the attributes of God and makes them real in-and-of themselves and not unified in reality but distinct in idea.

Distinctions of Reason Fail as an Explanation

Craig retorts to the last answer as inadequate to explain how properties are one in God, but God is not complex. He asserts, “To respond that these properties differ in our conception only, as manifestations of a single divine property, just as, say, ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ have different senses but both refer to the same reality (Venus) is inadequate. For *being the morning star* and *being the evening star* are distinct properties both possessed by Venus; in the same way, *being omnipotent* and *being good* are not different senses for the same property (as are, say, *being even* and *being divisible by two*) but are clearly distinct properties.”⁴³ He further adds, “Even if God has both properties in virtue of being in the same intrinsic state,

⁴¹Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 52.

⁴²Thomas Aquinas, *On The Power of God*, 7. 1.

⁴³Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 31, n3 (emphasis in original).

he nonetheless has both of these different properties.”⁴⁴ It seems as though Craig understands the properties of God in a Platonic realist sense. He appears to make it so that God participates in the form of omnipotence, God participates in the form of omniscience, etc. These forms are objects that look to be eternal and separate *from* the subject (i.e., God). Under this view whatever object is being predicated of a subject is distinct and independent from the subject. Craig states, “It would seem that properties do, in fact, exist and they are genuine universals.”⁴⁵ Since these independent properties are being predicated of God, these properties cannot be the same *and* God is a composite of these different properties. This objection has several problems.

First, the objection is based on a particular view of subject/predicate discourse that Craig must defend. His argument depends on a Platonic realist understanding of predicate attribution. This is a major assumption that needs to be defended against the moderate realism of the Thomist in order to show that distinctions of reason are not possible. This is not even addressed. Second, if Craig understands the properties of God as separate from God, then how does he explain their existence? Did God create them? Do they exist independently of God? Are God and these properties co-dependent?⁴⁶ Any answer given is unpleasant for the Christian Theist. For either God creates Himself, God is not the only eternal existent, or God is not independent. Third, it is important to reiterate, “Our intellect, since it knows God from creatures, in order to understand God, forms conceptions proportional to the perfections flowing from God to

⁴⁴Copan and Craig, 178.

⁴⁵Moreland and Craig, 214.

⁴⁶Craig attempts to address this issue, but ultimately withholds judgment for obvious reasons – the alternatives are depressing. Rather, he states that much work needs to be done in this area [despite its having been discussed since the time of Plato for nearly 2,300 years] and ends the conversation. Copan and Craig, 167-95.

creatures, which perfections pre-exist in God unitedly and simply, whereas in creatures they are received, divided and multiplied.”⁴⁷ Philosopher Peter Kreeft’s comments on this passage are instructive, “God’s perfections are all one objectively, ontologically, in God; but they are many subjectively, conceptually, in our mind – somewhat as white light refracted through a prism appears as many colors. . . . We cannot *understand how* these are one in God, but we can *know that* they are, for it has already been proved that God is absolutely simple, without any divisions.”⁴⁸ Contrary to Craig’s insistence, making a distinction of reason is immanently adequate. Indeed, the alternative is potentially disastrous.

The Incoherence of Essence *Is* Existence

The conclusion of Aquinas’ thought leads to man having no direct knowledge of God. For if what we know is being and God is infinite being, then finite man cannot know the infinite God directly. Further, God as pure act is simple and incomprehensible – His essence is to exist, He is the pure act of existence. Craig states, “His nature or essence is not even distinct from His existence, an assertion which led to the very difficult doctrine that God’s essence just *is* existence; He is, Thomas Aquinas tells us, the pure act of existing.”⁴⁹ Craig finds this puzzling, “To say that God’s essence just is His existence seems wholly obscure, since then there is in God’s case no entity that exists; there is just the existing itself without any subject.”⁵⁰ Therefore,

⁴⁷Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 13. 4.

⁴⁸Peter Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 125, n94 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 30 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 32, n3.

Craig concludes, “Things exist; but it is unintelligible to say that *exists* just exists.”⁵¹ Thus, identifying God’s essence with His existence is unintelligible. However, Craig’s objection is inadequate.

Thomists actually agree with Craig’s criticism that one cannot know God’s nature directly. However, just because one cannot understand something is not evidence that it is false. One may not know *how* something is the case, but they can know *that* it is the case. This is why the ontological argument is invalid.⁵² We do not know *esse* (i.e., the act of existing) only *essentia*, (i.e., nature/essence or mode of existence) but if one’s *essentia* is *esse* then of course it will be unintelligible to us. Knowing *that* God is existence is different than knowing *how* God is existence. Our minds are proportioned to the finite and not the infinite. Thus, to say that “*exists* just exists” is unintelligible is true – for us, but not for God. Our finite minds cannot understand the infinite, thus the need for analogy. Craig’s objection is not really an objection against the Thomistic position – rather it is an admission that we are ignorant of God’s being. But this is a conclusion in which the Thomist will agree. As H. D. Gardiel notes, “Because the essence of God is to exist, some would have it that in God there is no essence. This is true enough if it means that his existence is not determined by a formal principle of any kind, but it is false in the sense that God’s being has no nature at all, or is an indeterminate infinity.”⁵³ God *does* have a nature, but that nature is unknown directly to us since it is the pure act of existing.

⁵¹Moreland and Craig, 525 (emphasis in original).

⁵²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 2. 1.

⁵³H. D. Gardiel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 4, *Metaphysics*, trans. John A. Otto (St. Louis: B. Herder Book, 1967), 211.

Properties are incompatible with Personhood

Assuming that Thomists assert that God is a property Craig laments, “To say that God is His essence seems to make God into a property, which is incompatible with His being a living, concrete being.”⁵⁴ But this objection is dependent on the claim that God *is* a property. Thomists do not make this claim. Again, Craig is assuming that the attributes of God are individual and distinct properties, and *if this is the case* then Craig is correct. Of course, the question is why should we accept Craig’s interpretation of God being a property. As shown above, there is no reason to accept such an interpretation. Thus, Craig’s objection is only applicable to those that equate God with a property. Which may reveal the incoherence of his own view.⁵⁵

God Must do What He Knows

This is perhaps the greatest objection to divine simplicity. As Craig explains, “If God is not distinct from His essence, then God cannot know or do anything different than what He knows and does, in which case everything becomes necessary.”⁵⁶ Things are necessary because “He can have no contingent knowledge or action, for everything about him is essential to him. But in that case all modal distinctions collapse and everything becomes necessary. Since *God knows that p* is logically equivalent to *p is true*, the necessity of the former entails the necessity of the latter. Thus divine simplicity leads to an extreme fatalism, according to which everything

⁵⁴Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 31, n3.

⁵⁵Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 53.

⁵⁶Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 31-2, n3.

that happens does so, not with temporal necessity, but with logical necessity.”⁵⁷ That is, if God is simple, then all of reality is subject to an extreme fatalism. Not only does God know what we are going to do and cause it, but not even God is free to do other than He does. While this is by far the best objection against divine simplicity it still suffers several problems.

There is a distinction between antecedent necessity and consequent necessity. God’s freedom is antecedent in nature. He can do other than He does, but once He wills something it occurs necessarily as a consequence of His will. God freely willed to create, but this freedom is from eternity. God could have chosen to will something different, but once He wills one thing antecedently of consequence many things happen necessarily. There is no contradiction in affirming that God can be unchangeable and can freely will something. From all eternity God has made free, but unchangeable decisions.⁵⁸

Aquinas notes⁵⁹ that this error of saying God cannot do other than He does is connected to two schools of thought: one school says God acts out of natural necessity (where nature can *only* be as it is), and the other school says God cannot do other than He does (this is the argument of Craig). Aquinas then says that there are two senses in which something is said to be impossible. The first is absolutely, thus, when a principle necessary for a particular action does not extend to the action it is impossible. Such as, a man without a leg cannot walk. Secondly, something can be impossible by supposition. Thus, if we suppose the opposite of an action, then that action cannot be performed. If I am sitting down, then it is impossible that I should be

⁵⁷Moreland and Craig, 525 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 91-2.

⁵⁹Thomas Aquinas, *On The Power of God*, 1. 5.

running at the same time. Further, God must be understood in three areas: intellect, will, and power of nature. The intellect directs the will and the will directs the power. The intellect gives the will its desired object and the will carries out the appetite by power. There are two ways that God cannot do something. The first, is when God's *power* cannot extend to something – God cannot make what is true to be false. The second, is when God's *will* cannot extend to something – things will their own good, so God cannot will His own demise. Things will what is necessary to achieve its desired end. Aquinas comments,

Now the natural end of the divine will is the divine goodness, which it is unable not to will. . . . For even as the divine goodness is made manifest through these [created] things that are and through this order of things, so could it be made manifest through other creatures and another order . . . And this is where they erred: for they thought that the created order was commensurate and necessary to the divine goodness. It is clear then that God absolutely can do otherwise than he has done. . . . For if we suppose that he does not wish to do otherwise, or that he foresaw that he would not do otherwise, as long as the supposition stands, he cannot do otherwise, though apart from that supposition he can.⁶⁰

Aquinas notes that it is most evident that God could do otherwise than He has done, otherwise God would need creation in order to *be* good. But if God needs nothing, as is supposed, then God would not need to create something. But since something *has been* created it shows that God is free. And since it was shown previously that God lacks nothing and God created, then it follows that God created freely. So somehow divine simplicity and God's freedom are not contradictory – even if we do not know *how* it is the case.

In answering this very objection in the same article Aquinas notes, “Though God is unchangeable, his will is not confined to one issue as regards things to be done: hence he has

⁶⁰Ibid.

free-will.”⁶¹ That is, God was free *not* to create, but since He decided to create He must create as a consequence of a free decision. Aquinas also commented “since the goodness of God is perfect, and can exist without other things inasmuch as no perfection can accrue to him from them, it follows that His willing things apart from Himself is not absolutely necessary.”⁶² But does this not argue against simplicity? No. “Because the essence of God is His intellect and will, from the fact of His acting by His essence, it follows that He acts after the mode of intellect and will.”⁶³ Again, God is both free and simple, the two are not in contradiction to each other. If Craig insists his argument is about the necessity of a creature’s actions and so forth, then Aquinas can reply that the divine will does not impose necessity on the creature because, “This [divine] will is the first cause of all things, it produces certain effects through the mediation of secondary causes which are contingent and can fail. Thus the effect follows the contingency of the proximate cause, not the necessity of the first cause.”⁶⁴ Hence, the creatures are their own cause of their actions, but God is the creature’s source of being.

Failure of Possible World Semantics

In an attempt to avoid the criticism of the above argument that God must do what he knows, some proponents of divine simplicity have (apparently) attempted to skirt the difficulties by relying on possible world semantics. Craig argues, “To respond that God is perfectly similar

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 19. 3.

⁶³Ibid., I. 19. 4.

⁶⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, 23. 5.

in all logically possible worlds which we can imagine but that contingency is real because God stands in no real relations to things is to make the existence or non-existence of creatures in various possible world independent of God and utterly mysterious.”⁶⁵ Here the Thomist can actually agree with Craig. If one is to hold to divine simplicity there are much better arguments to make the case than resorting to possible world scenarios. For one thing, possible world scenarios are highly suspect.⁶⁶ For another thing, possible worlds are treated as *if they actually existed*. But they do not, they are simply mental constructs that have no ontological status outside the mind. Craig’s criticism on this issue stands, but only if one attempts to resort to possible worlds. As such, this does not affect the doctrine of simplicity at all.

God Is Not Really Related to Anything At All Other Than Himself

Craig summarizes his objection very nicely, “According to the doctrine of divine simplicity God has no distinct attributes, he stands in no real relations, his essence is not distinct from his existence, he just is the pure act of being subsisting.”⁶⁷ As such, “He never thinks successive thoughts, He never performs successive actions, He never undergoes even the most trivial alteration. God not only cannot undergo intrinsic change, He cannot even change extrinsically by being related to changing things.”⁶⁸ Therefore, “He stands in no relations

⁶⁵Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 32, n3.

⁶⁶A humorous question is, “is there a possible world where there are no other possible worlds?” For a philosophical critique of possible worlds see James W. Felt, “Why Possible Worlds Aren’t,” *The Review of Metaphysics* L, No. 1 (September 1996): 63-77.

⁶⁷Moreland and Craig 524.

⁶⁸Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 30-1.

whatsoever. Thus, He does not literally love, know, or cause His creatures.”⁶⁹ This is a serious objection. According to Craig, if God is simple, then He cannot love His creatures, know His creatures, or even cause His creatures.

It is unclear that the conclusion Craig desires actually follows from the premises. This seems to revolve around a confusion on what it means for God to be related to creation. Apparently, Craig assumes that for a relation to take place *both* parties must be able to undergo change. This is an assumption that would need to be defended. Further, Aquinas notes three types of relations: one where both are ideas, another where both are real, and another where one is an idea and the other real.⁷⁰ We are related to God as an idea to the real. Thus, God knows the relationship of dependence, but does not have it Himself.⁷¹ However, for the creature, the relation is real. Aquinas notes,

[A relation] signifies something not as adhering to a subject but as passing from it to something else . . . Now when a thing is attributed to someone as proceeding from him to another this does not argue composition between them . . . there can be no movement in relation: since without any change in the thing that is related to another, the relation can cease for the sole reason that this other is changed. Thus it is clear with regard to action that there is no movement in respect of action except metaphorically and improperly speaking, just as we say that one who passes from inaction into action is changed: and this would not be the case if relation or action signified something abiding in the subject. Hence it is evident that it is not incompatible with a thing’s simplicity to have many relations towards other things: indeed the more simple a thing is the greater the number of its concomitant relations: since its power is so much the less limited and consequently its causality so much the more extended. . . . Accordingly from God’s supreme simplicity there results an infinite number of respects or relations between creatures and him, inasmuch as he produced creatures distinct from himself and yet somewhat likened to him. . . . And yet although God is not in the same genus as the creature as a thing contained in a genus, he is nevertheless in every genus as the

⁶⁹Ibid., 30.

⁷⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 13. 7.

⁷¹Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 89.

principle of the genus: and for this reason there can be relation between the creature and God as between effect and principle.⁷²

Creatures are related to God because He is the cause of existence. God knows the effects that preexist in Him as their cause. Further, since God is the cause of creation He knows and loves His creation. And since a relation can be in multiple ways Craig is incorrect that God and creation are not related. God *does* cause His creation. God *does* know His creation. And God *does* love His creation. God does not need to change for a relation to take place. The relation occurs in the one that is created, but not *in* God. When one moves in relation to a pillar the pillar does not change, but a real change takes place in the one moving.⁷³

The Trinity Proves God is Composite

Perhaps the most popular argument against divine simplicity is the doctrine of the Trinity. Supposedly, if the doctrine of the Trinity is correct God cannot be simple. As Craig states, “[if simplicity is correct, God] is not really composed of three distinct persons, a claim notoriously difficult to reconcile with the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁷⁴ He affirms, “Thomas’ doctrine of the Trinity is doubtless inconsistent with his doctrine of divine simplicity. Intuitively, it seems obvious that a being that is absolutely without composition and transcends all distinction cannot have real relations subsisting with it.”⁷⁵ Craig’s own conception of the Trinity

⁷²Thomas Aquinas, *On The Power of God*, 7. 8.

⁷³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 13. 7.

⁷⁴Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 30.

⁷⁵Moreland and Craig, 586.

is likened to the analogy of a spiritual Cerberus.⁷⁶ In this conception God has three distinct centers of conscience, but one “body” in which they are connected. There are several problems with Craig’s criticism.

First, he ignores Aquinas’ principle that anything “composed” needs a composer. Thus, if God is composed of three persons, then God needs a composer. However, it is doubtful that this is what Craig understands by composition. Rather, Craig seems to understand God as the eternal “Cerberus.” Perhaps, there is some confusion on what is meant by “composition,” but the Thomist is going to have some problems with Craig’s use of the term. As Aquinas states, “in God together with supreme simplicity there is supreme perfection: wherefore in him there is *person* without composition. As to the parts which combine to make the definition of *person* they do not argue composition in *person* except in material substances.”⁷⁷ Aquinas shies away (and for good reason) from saying God is *composed* of three persons. For all things composed need a composer.

Second, Craig seems to confuse person and essence. Simplicity speaks only to God’s essence. Again, there appears to be a confusion on what is understood by simplicity. Craig understands simplicity as God having all His properties identical to each other. And under Craig’s understanding of simplicity he is correct – the Trinity *is* difficult to explain. However, this is *not* Aquinas’ understanding as stated above, nor the history of the Christian Church.

Third, for Aquinas God is one in essence, but three in persons. He says, “The word

⁷⁶Cerberus is the Greek mythological three headed dog that guards the path to Hades. Moreland and Craig, 593.

⁷⁷Thomas Aquinas, *On The Power of God*, 9. 3 (emphasis in original).

person signifies one that subsists in the divine nature distinctly and incommunicably: whereas the word *God* signifies one who has the divine nature without reference to distinction or incommunicability.”⁷⁸ There is relation within God. Though, there is not more than one mind in God there are three relations. These relations are in opposition to each other in the sense that they are not the same (i.e., the Father begets the Son who is begotten, but they are not distinct in essence). Persons may be considered in two ways: in reference to the essence of God they are identical, but in reference to one another they are mutually distinct.⁷⁹ Just as *one* stick has *two* ends, one end is not the other.

Fourth, Craig argues that Aquinas’ view is reducible to modalism.⁸⁰ As Craig understands it, “given divine simplicity, that each person just is that essence. But if two things are identical with some third thing, they are identical with each other. Therefore, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be distinct persons or relations. . . . For the Son’s intellect and act of understanding just are the Father’s intellect and act of understanding; the Son’s understanding himself is identical with the Father’s understanding himself. The Son seems but a name given to the Father’s *me*.”⁸¹ This shows a misunderstanding of the classical doctrine. While the Father is God, God is not the Father. This misunderstanding is based in an incorrect view of Aquinas’ understanding of the divine substance. Aquinas states, “The Son is the same God as the Father, yet it cannot be said that the Father in begetting the Son begot God who was himself; because

⁷⁸Ibid., 9. 6 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁹Ibid., 7. 1.

⁸⁰Moreland and Craig, 587.

⁸¹Ibid., 586-87 (emphasis in original).

himself being reciprocal indicates identity in the supposit: whereas in God Father and Son are two supposits.”⁸² The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God – but God is not individually any one of these three.

Fifth, Craig is simply incorrect to state that simplicity denies there are relationships *in* God. These distinctions in God are not according to God’s essence, but what is relational – personhood. “God is essentially one, but relationally three. Therefore, relationality in God does not entail composition.”⁸³ As two cities have one road between them, likewise God has three relations but only one essence.

Sixth, Craig says that to claim multiple relations in God is inadequate.⁸⁴ He claims relations do not cause, know, or love. Further, “to think that the intentional objects of God’s knowing himself and loving himself constitute in any sense really distinct persons is wholly implausible.”⁸⁵ Again, Craig misunderstands Aquinas. He assumes that the Father and God are identical – which as shown above is not the case. Also Craig, misstates Aquinas in identifying relations as impersonal. Craig’s understanding of relation is not the same as Aquinas. Indeed, it is unclear exactly how Craig understands the term relation. However, for Aquinas it is being used as a subjective term within God to identify the different persons.

Finally, with a denial of simplicity Craig struggles with having to avoid tritheism. Truly, it is difficult to see under Craig’s conception of the Trinity how the divine persons can be of one

⁸²Thomas Aquinas, *On The Power of God*, 9. 8 (emphasis in original).

⁸³Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 310.

⁸⁴Moreland and Craig, 586.

⁸⁵Ibid.

mind and will? For Craig there are three distinct centers of divine consciousness – a social trinitarianism. He says, “Although the church fathers rejected analogies like Cerberus, once we give up divine simplicity, Cerberus does seem to represent what Augustine called an image of the Trinity among creatures.”⁸⁶ The problem with this is that Augustine believed in divine simplicity – as did most of the historical church. Further, to make sense of this Craig insists that God is a soul with three centers of self-consciousness – thus, there is a three in oneness. The essence must be one and the three distinct persons must be united, somehow, in that one essence. Does this sound almost suspiciously like the doctrine of simplicity? It should, they are very similar. What Craig denies to Thomists he accepts for himself. He denies composition in God to avoid tritheism, but accepts composition in God to explain His properties. Which is it? Is God composed or not? If God is composed, then He is composed not only of distinct properties but also of *three* gods. If God is not composed, then his criticisms of divine simplicity crumble. The doctrine of simplicity is not compatible with social trinitarianism, and social trinitarianism is not compatible with monotheism. Even if one grants Craig’s view of social trinitarianism, it is difficult to see how he avoids tritheism – for there are still three distinct centers of consciousness, each with their own will and volition. Thus, under Craig’s understanding of properties do these distinct centers of consciousness have their own distinct soul? Of course Craig denies this, but this is the very explanation he denies to Thomists on God’s simplicity. Craig sells the farm in order to purchase a bushel. He denies simplicity to save a near heretical view of the Trinity.

⁸⁶Ibid., 593.

Conclusion

This project has sought to provide a defense of divine simplicity particularly against the criticisms of William Lane Craig. Divine simplicity has no scripture passage contradicting it, but several passages that lend support for the doctrine. The main thrust of the doctrine is found in a moderate realist approach to understanding reality. If God is pure act with no potency (and there is good reason to think so), then *ipso facto* God is simple. All arguments and criticisms – even those dealing with the Trinity – must be able to either understand the criticisms in a context of divine simplicity or rework the whole metaphysical enterprise. Craig seems to accept Aquinas' arguments for God's existence, but denies the conclusions of those arguments. This is irrational. Craig needs to either restate the arguments, deny them, or replace them with better ones.

Craig's objections to divine simplicity reveal that he misunderstands the nature of the doctrine in favor of a Platonic realist understanding of reality. He then reads that Platonic realism into simplicity and criticizes it on that basis. Several of Craig's criticisms do not even affect a Thomistic understanding of simplicity – only a Platonic realist understanding of simplicity. Craig's objections based on the Trinity are unfounded and are connected to a view that borders on heresy. As such, there are very good reasons to accept divine simplicity and no good reasons to deny it. By far the best two reasons to reject simplicity – God's acting out of necessity and the Trinity – *can* be answered in a context of divine simplicity. When the history of the church holds a particular doctrine it is incumbent upon us to understand why they held that view. To dismiss their counsel is ill advised. This doctrine has had a illustrious past and if modern philosophers and theologians partake in the metaphysical enterprise there is a good chance it will have a celebrated future. There is a reason that the church has historically held to

divine simplicity. We would do well to know why.

APPENDIX ONE

Popular Level Objections of Ronald Nash

Ronald Nash has also criticized divine simplicity. His comments deserve some attention, though many of his complaints follow the thought of Alvin Plantinga.⁸⁷ Nash (incorrectly) comments that simplicity attempts to avoid the following dilemma: if God has a nature, then He is not sovereign, but if God is sovereign, then He does not have a nature. Thus, “Aquinas’s attempt to escape the dilemma by equating God with His nature is unsatisfactory . . . because it

⁸⁷Indeed, many of Nash’s objections are quoted directly from Plantinga. Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 85-97.

entails conclusions that conflict with other important tenets of Christian theism [i.e., God has only one property and God is a person].”⁸⁸ First, Aquinas held to divine simplicity *not* to solve a dilemma but because it is demanded by the metaphysical position. Second, it is doubtful that any Thomist would agree with Nash that simplicity attributes only one “property” to God – indeed, Nash’s concept of property and the Thomist’s are different. Finally, it is strange that Nash affirms that God *is* a person. While God is certainly personable, it must be stated unequivocally that God *is three* persons. Of course Nash may be using the common vernacular in saying that God is a person to mean that God is personal. However, without this distinction Nash will end up with a contradiction in affirming the Trinity. God is not three persons in one person or three essences in one essence. God is three persons in one essence.

Nash concludes, “It would appear that Christian theologians have no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine simplicity. It seems doubtful that the doctrine adds anything significant to our understanding of God. No satisfactory analysis of simplicity has yet been given.”⁸⁹ There are several problems with Nash’s statement. First, there is good reason to accept divine simplicity – namely the acceptance of the act/potency understanding of reality. Since God is pure act it follows necessarily that He is simple. Second, divine simplicity adds immensely to our understanding of God – it helps us to understand *how* or in what *mode* God exists. Likewise, other attributes of God depend on this doctrine, such as, aseity, necessity, immutability, eternality, and infinity. Further, it helps us make sense of the metaphysical enterprise. Also, any truth about God is not trivial, but of immanent importance. Third, a satisfactory analysis of

⁸⁸Ibid.), 95.

⁸⁹Ibid.

simplicity *has* been given. In his chapter on simplicity, Nash does *not quote once* from Aquinas on this topic either from *The Summa Theologica* or *On The Power of God* (though he does reference the *Summa* article in a footnote).⁹⁰ This is disappointing, to say the least, from such an otherwise excellent scholar.⁹¹

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⁹⁰Ibid., 86.

⁹¹This is not to say that Nash misrepresented Aquinas' position, it is only to point out that he has not sufficiently presented Aquinas' thoughts on the topic. How Nash can dismiss Aquinas' treatment on simplicity and assert that no satisfactory analysis on simplicity has been given is truly baffling.

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