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God, faith and reason in the Philosophy
of Nicholas Wolterstorff

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Introduction

Abstract: *Inquiring About a Simple God* explores the philosophical position of Nicholas Wolterstorff on the divine simplicity doctrine. A central tenet in Western theism, this doctrine faces serious objections owing to its alleged intrinsic and systematic incoherence. Appealing to the constituent-relational ontology distinction, Wolterstorff explains the contemporary bafflement over the doctrine. In this paper, I shall argue that, on relational ontology, reason is being restricted in its natural capacity to know the objective truth of reality. For this reason, the rejection on divine simplicity as incoherent from the perspective of relational ontology is quite premature and unwarranted.

Key words: divine simplicity, relational ontology, constituent ontology.

Resumen: *Inquiring About a Simple God* examina la postura de Nicholas Wolterstorff sobre la doctrina de la simplicidad divina. Esta doctrina, que es central en teísmo, sufre graves objeciones con respecto a su coherencia intrínseca y sistemática. Acudiendo a la distinción entre ontología constituyente y relacional, Wolterstorff arroja luz sobre la dificultad de la filosofía analítica contemporánea en aceptarla. Sostengo, en cambio que, con la ontología relacional, la razón queda restringida en su capacidad de conocer la verdad objetiva. Por tanto, el rechazo de la simplicidad divina desde la perspectiva de la ontología relacional parece precipitado y carece de fundamento.

Palabras claves: simplicidad divina, ontología relacional, ontología constituyente.

The most obvious application of the persistent philosophical and theological problem on the relationship between faith and reason concerns issues about God. And the topmost question in contemporary discussions focuses on the doctrine of divine simplicity. Nicholas Wolterstorff's contribution to this debate consists mainly in explaining why the simplicity doctrine seems non-problematic to the medieval thinkers while it causes bafflement to the contemporary analytic philosophers. The distinction he makes between constituent and relational ontological styles may have shed light on this enigma. Yet, it does not resolve the issue. Nevertheless, it allows us to see some possible way out.

In this investigation, I wish to explore Wolterstorff's philosophical position on the classical divine simplicity doctrine. While I adhere to his diagnosis that the contemporary bafflement over the said doctrine is attributable to the

relational ontological approach that characterizes the contemporary analytic philosophy, I question the tenability of this approach. After a rigorous analysis, I hold that on relation ontology, reason is being restricted in its natural capacity to know the objective truth of reality. The most that this ontological approach could grasp is the veridical truth or the truth of the proposition. On relation ontology, reason tends to reduce being into its predicative conceptualization, thereby neglecting being *qua* being.

On the relational approach, divine simplicity necessarily appears intrinsically incoherent. Yet, the problem lies, not in the doctrine, but in the approach. Hence, this study suggests that, upon discovering the inadequacy of relational style in viewing reality, we must recuperate Thomas Aquinas' *real-veridical* distinction of being as a *conditio sine qua non* for a more profound understanding of the divine simplicity doctrine. Moreover, to demonstrate its intrinsic coherence, this doctrine must be understood in the light of the Thomistic classical notion of God as Pure Actuality and Subsistent Existence. Only in this way will the objections on the doctrine's systematic incoherence with other theistic claims be dissolved. Once the intrinsic and rational coherence of the simplicity doctrine is established, we can see how reason and faith interact like «two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth»¹.

Our examination on Wolterstorff's inquiry about a simple God naturally leads us to an engagement with his positions on various questions like divine immutability, eternity and omniscience. As we shall see, besides arguing within a relational ontological style, our author's arguments are based mainly on the data of faith as it is found in the Sacred Scriptures. Hence, part of this thesis' aim is to affirm that reason, rightly understood and exercised, cannot be in conflict with faith and revelation. The inquiry on the doctrine on divine simplicity can attest to that. Thus, far from being irrelevant to the contemporary philosophical discussion on God especially in the analytic milieu, the simplicity doctrine must take its proper place at the heart of Western theism.

In my analysis and critique of Wolterstorff's position, I am greatly indebted to the works of Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity*, Enrique Moros, *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga* and *Modalidad y esencia*, where

¹ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter «Fides et Ratio» on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason*, [September 14, 1998], in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 91 (1999), «Introduction». (From here on, FR).

this author makes a thorough analysis of relation ontology, Fernando Inciarte, *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje: ensayos de metafísica*, and Alejandro Llano, *Metaphysics and Language*. I also owe a lot to the works of William Vallicella, Eleonor Stump & Norman Kretzmann, Katherin Rogers, Brian Leftow and Gregory Ganssle.

As to the method, I follow a similar methodology used by our author. Calling it «Calvinist dialectic» of affirmation, negation and redemption, I attempt to point out, first, the merits of Wolterstorff's position. After specifying some of his objectionable points, I made an attempt to recuperate what could possibly be sustained. All of these in the spirit of the «dialogue of cultures» that Pope Benedict XVI exhorts philosophers and theologians in Regensburg.

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Abbreviations

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Inquiring About a Simple God

*«God is more truly thought
than He is spoken of and is
more truly than He is thought»¹*

Saint Augustine of Hippo

If God is absolutely simple, how can I pray to Him? The question seems naïve, but behind it is a whole gamut of philosophical and theological inquiries about God and His relation to man and the world. At the heart of the classic Western theism lies the doctrine of divine simplicity, which holds that God is radically distinct from creatures in that neither metaphysical nor physical composition can be found in Him. Viewed as the hallmark for divine transcendence², the doctrine reverberates in the discussions of other divine attributes (like immutability and eternity), as it confers God a unique ontological status that affects greatly everything that is said of Him. But not a few contemporary thinkers find this status extremely peculiar, especially in its relation to Christian faith.

In seeking a better understanding of his faith, Nicholas Wolterstorff finds it inevitable to inquire about a simple God. In this chapter, I shall attempt first to trace succinctly the origins and motivations of the simplicity doctrine and how its classic formulation fares in the hands of contem-

¹ AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, 7, 4, 7. (Citations are from AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, MCKENNA, S., C.S.S.R. (trans.), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1963).

² Peter Weigel notes that the doctrine is «indispensable to any credible notion of God's absolute perfection and transcendence» (WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundation of His Philosophical Theology*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 2008, p. 15).

porary philosophers. Then, I shall analyze Wolterstorff's diagnosis on the contemporary bafflement over this doctrine with his distinction between relational and constituent ontological approaches. Finally, after showing the inadequacy of relational ontology, I shall argue that our author's rejection of the simplicity doctrine on the ground of its alleged incoherence based on this approach is quite premature and unwarranted. Inquiring about a simple God requires the recovery of Thomas Aquinas' notions of Pure Act and Subsistent Existence. This, in turn, calls for complementing relational with constituent ontology.

1. WHY DIVINE SIMPLICITY?

A brief historical overview on the origins, formulations and motivations of the simplicity doctrine allows for a better contextualization of our discussion.

1.1. *Origins*

The problem about a simple being is as old as the Western philosophical question on the one and the many. Thales, Parmenides and a host of Greek thinkers agree that there must be some fundamental unity that underlies the vast multiplicity of individual beings, their kinds and qualities. By Parmenides' time, the view that simplicity is a perfection that implies immutability and incorruptibility was already established. Plato, locating this unity in the World of Forms, posits the idea of the Supreme Good as constituting such unity and perfection – a doctrine that strongly influenced the Jewish and early Christian reflection on divine attributes. However, as the causal role of the Supreme Good remains vague, Aristotle suggests the idea of a Supreme Being, the First Mover and Efficient Cause of all beings, which is simple, subsisting, and immutable. Yet, Aristotle's Supreme Being remains only as a cosmic mover rather than a creator *ex nihilo*, and is still considered ontologically finite by theistic standards.

At the close of the ancient world, the Greek idea of a simple first principle was already prominent within the revival of classical Hellenistic philosophy. The Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria holds that the notion of God as Being itself, utterly simple, devoid of composition and eternal was a

common tenet. He identifies the philosopher's simple first being with the Hebrew Scripture's personal God who consciously creates things modeled after the divine ideas³.

However, the simplicity principle found its fullest expression in Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists⁴. In his *Enneads*, Plotinus speaks of the simple first principle as «the One», the least inadequate name for the source of all, which is unknowable, inexpressible, uncaused, self-explanatory and transcends all categories applicable to other things⁵.

Even in calling it The First we mean no more than to express that it is the most absolutely simplex: it is Self-Sufficing only in the sense that it is not of that compound nature which would make it dependent upon any constituent; it is the Self-Contained because everything contained in something alien must also exist by that alien⁶.

Christian theological speculation in the Fathers of the Church and especially in the Middle Ages has given the simplicity doctrine extraordinary prominence⁷ because, as Wolterstorff notes, the doctrine's theoretical fecundity provides extraordinary framework significance. «If one grants God's simplicity, then one also has to grant a large number of other divine attributes: immateriality, eternity, immutability, having no unrealized potentialities, etc., one's interpretation of all God's other attributes will have to be formed in the light of that conviction»⁸. However, in the contemporary discussion especially among analytic philosophers, the question arises on whether both critics and defenders work with the traditional formula set forth by the late classical and medieval theologians like Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas.

³ Cfr. WEIGEL, P., «Divine Simplicity», in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, March 29, 2010, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/div-simp/#H1>> [Last consulted: September 12, 2011], p. 2.

⁴ Cfr. ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», in *Religious Studies*, 32/2 (1996), p. 165.

⁵ Cfr. PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, V, 3, 13; VI, 9, 3. (For this work I am using CORRIGAN, K., *Reading Plotinus: a Practical Introduction to Neo-Platonism* [Recurso electrónico], Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Ind., 2005).

⁶ PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, II, 9, 1.

⁷ «Divine simplicity lies at the heart of the classic Western philosophical concept of God» (WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 13).

⁸ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», in WOLTERSTORFF, N., *Inquiring About God*, p. 91.

1.2. *Classical Formulations*

Wolterstorff and most contemporary analytic philosophers agree that Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas epitomize the classical formulation of the simplicity doctrine⁹. The latter's version, however, is distinguished «to represent the historical peak of the doctrine's articulation and defense»¹⁰ and is usually referred to in contemporary discussions as the standard. In fact, Wolterstorff's critical engagement with this doctrine focuses on its classical Thomistic formulation, which, he claims, together with «most other classic formulations, fails to meet the requirement that it be compatible with what Christian Scripture claims and presupposes about God»¹¹. Specifically, he focuses on what he calls the three theistic identity claims: (a) God is identical with His essence; (b) God's essence is identical with His existence; and (c) God's essence is identical with His attributes¹².

However, I think Rogers rightly argues that in the contemporary discussions, «the traditional position has frequently been misrepresented. Thus, recent criticisms, even if they are cogent, succeed only against the doctrine of simplicity in its current form. And if the recent defenses seem tortuous and inadequate this need not cast doubt upon the defensibility of the traditional position»¹³. Curiously enough, Wolterstorff himself holds that the theistic identity claims «emerged from the attempt of the medieval philosophers to articulate the doctrine of divine simplicity. They are not to be identified with the doctrine itself»¹⁴.

In his book, *The City of God*, Augustine affirms that God's nature is simple because «it is what it has»¹⁵. We may take this to mean primarily that God

⁹ But Katherin Rogers warns of a «decided differences in the metaphysics of these three thinkers, and the differences are felt in their discussions of this crucial question of divine simplicity» (ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 170).

¹⁰ Cfr. BROWER, J. E., «Making Sense of Divine Simplicity», in *Faith and Philosophy*, 25/1 (January, 2008), p. 3.

¹¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Introduction», in WOLTERSTORFF, N., *Inquiring About God*, p. 12.

¹² At the outset, let it be noted that Wolterstorff seems to take the simplicity doctrine in its positive sense. But as we shall see shortly, the doctrine is apophatic in its original conception.

¹³ ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 165.

¹⁴ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 108.

¹⁵ «Our reason for calling it simple is because it is what it has – with the exception of the real relations in which the Persons stand to each other» (AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, XI, 10, WALSH, G. G. and MONAHAN, G. (trans.), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1963, p. 202).

is His attributes and that there is no ontological distinction between them. Hence, whenever we say that God *has* any of His essential qualities, we take it strictly to mean that God *is* whatever quality we say of Him. In *The Trinity*, Augustine affirms:

We indeed use many different words concerning God, in order to bring out that He is great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else He may be called that is not unworthy of Him. But His greatness is the same as His wisdom... His goodness is the same as His wisdom and greatness; and His truth is the same as all these qualities. And in Him it is not one thing to be blessed, and another thing to be great, or to be wise, or to be true, or to be good, or in a word to be Himself¹⁶.

Anselm argues in the same vein when he writes,

A human being cannot *be* justice, but he can *have* justice. Consequently, a just human being is not understood as existent justice (*existens iustitia*), but rather as having justice. Now the supreme nature cannot properly be said to *have* justice, but rather to *exist as* justice. Therefore, when He is said to be just, He is properly understood as existent justice, not as having justice¹⁷.

What Augustine and Anselm make clear in these passages is that divine nature does not *possess* essential attributes but it *is* these attributes. Otherwise, (a) God would not be what He is *per se* but *per aliud*, which is against the doctrine of divine aseity; and (b) God's essential attributes would be what they are independently of God's activity, which is against the doctrine of divine sovereignty¹⁸.

¹⁶ AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, VI, 7, 8.

¹⁷ ANSELM, *Monologion*, XVI. (I am using ANSELM, *Monologion and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, WILLIAMS, T. (trans. with Introduction and Notes), Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis, 1995).

¹⁸ Alvin Plantinga holds that the «fundamental reason (for the simplicity doctrine) is to accommodate God's aseity and sovereignty» (PLANTINGA, A., *Does God Have a Nature?*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 1980, p. 28). But Plantinga argues that «God has a nature which is not identical with Him» (p. 10). If this is true, then, we are faced with the problem which Rogelio Rovira has clearly pointed out: «¿Cuál es el estatuto ontológico de las verdades eternas y en qué consiste la diversa y peculiar relación que guardan estas verdades con el ser infinito de Dios y con el entendimiento finito del hombre?» (ROVIRA, R., «¿Puede hacer Dios lo imposible?: sobre la concepción cartesiana de la omnipotencia divina», in *Revista de Filosofía*, 3ª época, 6/10 (1993), p. 349).

In Aquinas' version, simplicity is taken as a negative concept – it means the absence or negation of any composition. In treating the divine simplicity in eight articles in his *Summa Theologiae*¹⁹, Aquinas proceeds by examining all possible compositions that are found in creatures to see if any of them takes place in God. After proving that none is found compatible with the divine nature, he concludes that God is absolutely simple. Weigel succinctly observes that Aquinas' presentation «effects an increasing precision and cumulative enrichment of the concept of simplicity... The *Summa Theologiae* begins with simplicity in the material order and then proceeds by way of the logical order to the ontological one»²⁰. Aquinas' arguments could be summarized as follows²¹:

- a) God is not composed of any extended parts: God is not a body.
- b) God is not composed of matter and form: God is a spirit.
- c) God is not composed of substance and accidents: God is a substance without accidents.
- d) God is not composed of essence and being: God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*.
- e) God is not composed of subject and nature: hence, God is absolutely simple.

In order to negate whatever composition in God, Aquinas proposes a series of arguments²²: (a) All composite entails act-potency distinction. But God is simply Pure Act; (b) Every composition is posterior to its components, and is dependent on them. But God is the First Being; (c) All composite has a cause. But God is the First Uncaused Cause. If, in God there is no composition whatsoever, then, God must be absolutely simple. Thus, to engage with the Aquinas' version and to have a better grasp of it, one has to examine thoroughly these three fundamental Thomistic tenets: Act and Potency, *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, First Uncaused Cause²³. Their profound understanding helps

¹⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 3. (I am using THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, 2nd and revised ed., Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans.), KNIGHT, K. [Electronic On-line Edition], New Advent, 2009). (From here on, *S. TH.*)

²⁰ WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 24.

²¹ For a more concise and substantial presentation of Aquinas' simplicity doctrine, see GONZÁLEZ, A. L., *Teología natural*, 6^a ed., EUNSA, Pamplona, 2008, pp. 157-164).

²² *S. TH.* I, q. 3, a. 7.

²³ On these points, Weigel observes that «contemporary philosophers of religion often do not understand his (Aquinas') position or delve very deeply into it» (WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 13).

one to see how, *contra* Wolterstorff, the simplicity doctrine can be logically sustained²⁴.

But the apophatic character of the concept of simplicity does not mean that nothing can be known of God²⁵. Patrick Madigan accurately notes that, with Aquinas' version of simplicity doctrine, traditional theism is saved from falling into apophatic or purely negative theology without compromising divine transcendence. At the same time, it has avoided pluralism in the predication of divine attributes – a pluralism that, I think, borders on some form of anthropomorphism. Madigan notes that two doctrines allow Aquinas to achieve this: (a) the identity claims with the doctrine on Pure Act; (b) the principle of effects resembling their cause²⁶.

1.3. *Motivations and Reasons*

Traditional theism often characterizes God's absolute independence in terms of aseity²⁷. The Anselmian notion of God as maximally perfect – as that than which nothing greater can be conceived – and Aquinas' *Five Ways* to demonstrate that God exists as the Uncaused First Cause²⁸ necessarily entail that God must be absolutely independent²⁹. Now, an absolutely independent being

²⁴ González argues that to show that God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* is the ultimate proof for divine simplicity. «Bastaría, pues, probar que en Dios no existe este tipo de composición para que dejen de tener sentido, aplicables a Él, las demás composiciones... La composición y la distinción real de esencia y acto de ser es (...) la estructura fundamental que todo ente creado tiene. En consecuencia, si se demuestra que a Dios no le compete tampoco este tipo de composición, puede uno comprender mejor que tampoco se dan las demás estructuras y podrá, en cierto modo, atisbar algo de lo que es la simplicidad divina» (GONZÁLEZ, A. L., *Teología natural*, pp. 160-161).

²⁵ «La simplicidad divina no es ausencia de contenido, sino por el contrario infinita riqueza, plenitud de realidad poseída en perfecta unidad. La ausencia de toda composición no señala algún tipo de no ser, no implica defecto de cualquier tipo en Dios, sino precisamente al revés. La suprema simplicidad de Dios es, al mismo tiempo, el Todo separado, infinitamente perfecto» (GONZÁLEZ, A. L., *Teología natural*, p. 164).

²⁶ Cfr. MADIGAN, P., «Review on WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of his Philosophical Theology*», in *The Heythrop Journal*, 50/4 (July 2009), p. 724.

²⁷ Cfr. BROWER, J. E., «Simplicity and Aseity», in FLINT, T. P. and REA, M. C. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 4.

²⁸ S. TH. I, q. 2, a. 3. The notion of God as the Uncaused Cause requires clarification. Ángel Luis González makes clear that no being could be its own cause because nothing can be in act and in potency in the same respect. For a more detailed analysis of Aquinas' Second Way, see GONZÁLEZ, A. L., *Teología natural*, pp. 106-109.

²⁹ Cfr. S. TH. I, q. 3, a. 7. This is especially true when the *Five Ways* are considered as a whole and viewed from a unified perspective.

exists entirely by itself (*a se*). And a self-subsisting being must be absolutely simple. Divine aseity, then, is the chief motivation for divine simplicity.

However, Brower notes that even traditional theists are in disagreement as to whether or not divine aseity is essential to God's nature.³⁰ Those who follow the Aristotelian thought, like Aquinas, consider divine aseity as the most fundamental feature of our notion of God. Meanwhile, others who argue along neo-Platonic veins take divine perfection as the most basic. Divine aseity, for them, simply follows directly from divine goodness. It is argued that dependence on another is an imperfection. If God is absolutely perfect, He must exist *a se*.

Classic theism also views the simplicity doctrine as a guarantee to divine transcendence. Since God is identical with Himself and His attributes, He is radically different from the rest of beings³¹. Vallicella says that the doctrine «is to be understood as an affirmation of God's absolute transcendence of creatures. God is not only radically non-anthropomorphic, but radically non-creatuomorphic, not only in respect of the properties he possesses, but in his manner of possessing them. God, we could say, differs in His very ontology from any and all created beings»³². Weigel notes that for Aquinas, «simplicity is indispensable for upholding God's transcendence. Its claims constitute God being infinitely separate from every other entity and so too from any competing notion of a divinity or first principle»³³.

Adherents to divine simplicity often highlight two reasons for adopting the doctrine. Eleonor Stump and Norman Kretzmann argue that the doctrine enables us to solve the *Euthyphro* paradox concerning God's relationship to morality. God neither invents nor obeys the moral law. He is the standard of goodness since He *is* Perfect Goodness itself³⁴. Besides, the doctrine supports

³⁰ Cfr. BROWER, J. E., «Simplicity and Aseity», pp. 4-5.

³¹ David B. Burrell holds that divine simplicity distinguishes God from the world and is «part of what assures us we are talking about divinity» (BURRELL, D., «Distinguishing God from the World», in DAVIES, B., OP (ed.), *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe, OP*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987, p. 77).

³² VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity», in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 2, 2010, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/divine-simplicity>> [Last consulted: November 22, 2011], p. 1. Thus, on this perspective, to view God's *having* properties in the same way we view creatures *having* properties is, to me, a crass error.

³³ WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 13.

³⁴ Cfr. STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Absolute Simplicity», in *Faith and Philosophy*, 2/4 (October, 1985), pp. 376-378; cfr. also ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 167.

the cosmological argument³⁵ and, as Brian Leftow maintains, offers a variant of the ontological argument³⁶.

Wolterstorff, in criticizing divine simplicity, immutability, eternity and impassibility, tries to show that Aquinas' argument for divine aseity is mistaken. «I do not believe that God is simple, ontologically immutable, eternal in the sense of being outside of time, or impassible... If simplicity, eternity, ontological immutability, and impassibility all have to go, then aseity also has to go»³⁷. But something in Wolterstorff's interpretation of Aquinas' view on divine aseity makes one think that a misinterpretation occurs, making such rejection unwarranted. Wolterstorff says, for instance, that

If God uniquely possessed aseity, then not only the existence but also the properties of everything other than God would be dependent on God, while the existence and properties of God would not be dependent on anything other than God... My disagreement is with the claim that God's having the properties God does have is never dependent on anything other than God³⁸.

For Wolterstorff, God's *having* properties depends also on creatures (like *God's being wronged by us*). But on the aseity doctrine, God's *having* properties cannot depend either on God or on anything other than God simply because, strictly speaking, God *does not have* properties, or, at least, not in the way creatures *have* them. Instead, God *is* His properties. As Vallicella rightly points out, «the divine aseity would seem to require that God *be* rather *have* his

³⁵ Stump and Kretzmann argue that the doctrine «can supply... the explanation of the necessity of God's existence. The answer to the question 'Why does God exist?' is that He cannot not exist... because He is absolutely simple, He is identical with His nature... The necessity of God's existence is not one more characteristic of God which needs an explanation of its own but is instead a logical consequence of God's absolute simplicity» (STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Absolute Simplicity», p. 377).

³⁶ Leftow holds: «Regardless of what attributes a God identical with His nature will have and of whether one opts for full divine simplicity, the Identity Thesis yields a way to argue for God's existence» (LEFTOW, B., «Is God an Abstract Object?» in *Noûs*, 24/4 (September, 1990), p. 595).

³⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Introduction», pp. 12, 15.

³⁸ For example, «that *being wronged by us* is one of the things that characterize God. God has this property on account of our having wronged God; had we not wronged God, God would not have this property. Thus God's having that property is dependent on us» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Introduction», p. 15).

attributes»³⁹. Thus, seen from this perspective, Wolterstorff's disagreement becomes null and void because the question on dependence loses its sense.

However, deeper analysis would reveal that latent in Wolterstorff's objection is the assumption that divine aseity or simplicity is incompatible with God's relationship with the world. God's being wronged by us presupposes such relationship. But if God is absolutely simple, how can He relate or act in the world? In his study on how Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa have transformed the question on divine simplicity, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz argues that it is precisely God's relationship with the world which the simplicity doctrine upholds. «One must continually seek for ways to show what it means that 'God' and 'world' are not opposites... Divine simplicity tells us that God is *distinct* from the world, not that God is opposed to it in such a way that God cannot by definition act in the world. Divine simplicity will always sanction contradiction. But divine activity in the world is not a contradiction in terms»⁴⁰. The said assumption pervades the contemporary objections against divine simplicity.

2. CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Wolterstorff observes that contemporary theologians seldom deal with the simplicity doctrine in their reflections about God⁴¹. As Brower concurs, «Philosophers and theologians now seldom speak of divine simplicity, and when they do, their remarks are almost always critical. Indeed, contemporary analytic theists often take themselves to have conclusive reasons for rejecting it»⁴². Brower has in mind C. B. Martin who says, «The trouble with the idea is just that it is hogwash»⁴³. Quentin Smith declares, not without

³⁹ VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity», p. 3.

⁴⁰ RADDE-GALLWITZ, A., *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 232.

⁴¹ «And when they do, they rarely (if ever) give it a significant structural role in their doctrine of God – let alone give it the pre-eminent role that it enjoyed in the articulated doctrine of God developed by the medieval school theologians» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», pp. 91-92).

⁴² BROWER, J. E., «Simplicity and Aseity», p. 1.

⁴³ MARTIN, C.B., «God, the Null Set and Divine Simplicity», in KING-FARLOW, J. (ed.), *The Challenge to Religion Today*, New York: Science History, 1976, p. 40, cited by BROWER, J. E., «Simplicity and Aseity», pp. 1-2.

bias, that divine simplicity is not only «plainly self-contradictory, and its hold on some people's minds testifies to the predominance of faith over intellectual coherence»⁴⁴.

Weigel classifies the objections against the simplicity doctrine into three categories: one intrinsic and two systematic⁴⁵. As to the intrinsic type, some contemporary theists reject the doctrine on the grounds that identifying God with pure actuality and pure subsistent existence is «ill-founded or even incoherent»⁴⁶. The first type of systematic objection holds that simplicity is incompatible with the multiple predicates attributed to God. Wolterstorff is inscribed to the second type, which holds that simplicity doctrine is inconsistent with particular divine attributes predicated of God in Sacred Scriptures and religious worship. Our author himself observes that an immutable, unchanging and simple divinity is incompatible with the knowing, loving and redeeming biblical God.

Weigel, however, observes that the intensely systematic focus of the contemporary debates is mainly due to the critics' assumption that the doctrine is a prominent barrier to any intuitively sensible concept of God that must be removed⁴⁷. In discussing these contemporary objections and in presenting their possible responses, I wish to point out how the Angelic Doctor could engage with some of our contemporaries and, in so doing, highlight his relevance to contemporary philosophy.

⁴⁴ SMITH, Q., «An Analysis of Holiness», in *Religious Studies*, 24 (1988), p. 524, note no. 3.

⁴⁵ Cfr. WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, pp. 16-19. Radde-Gallwitz calls the two systematic objections the *identity thesis* and *radical apophaticism*. God's identity with His attributes is incompatible with the belief on «particular providence» and «prevenient grace». Divine simplicity entails that God is beyond His attributes, which is incompatible with the positive divine titles that the Bible attribute to God. Basil and Gregory's concept of *propria*, says Radde-Gallwitz, helps in confronting these objections (cfr. RADDE-GALLWITZ, A., *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa...*, pp. 10-11). See discussion on *Multiple Predicates*.

⁴⁶ Weigel cites Anthony Kenny, who takes this as his central thesis in criticizing Aquinas (cfr. KENNY, A., *Aquinas on Being*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002), Christopher Hughes, who is skeptical that this position makes sense (cfr. HUGHES, C., *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1989), and C.J. F. Williams, whose analysis is a fair representative of the modern view (cfr. WILLIAMS, C. J. F., «Being», in QUINN, P. and TALIAFERRO, C. (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. 223-228).

⁴⁷ Weigel also notes that most of the contemporary discussion citing Aquinas' notion of divine simplicity is centered only on the question of the doctrine's systematic coherence with other predicates and that studies on its intrinsic character are few, and at most, lacking in philosophical depth (cfr. WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, pp. 15-16).

2.1. *Question on Coherence*

As Vallicella accurately clarifies, the question on coherence refers not so much on whether the simplicity doctrine is true or possibly true, but on «whether it is possible for us to think (of) it without obvious contradiction»⁴⁸, that is, whether there is any ontological framework within which the divine simplicity doctrine is coherently defensible. This is important because it allows us to see that even if most contemporary thinkers could present cogent arguments proving the doctrine's incoherence, its utter rejection on this ground is not decisive, for in fact, as Wolterstorff himself holds, it could be proven coherent on some other ontological framework.

Wolterstorff refers to Alvin Plantinga's book, *Does God Have a Nature?*, for a lucid presentation of the difficulties involving the theistic identity claims⁴⁹. Plantinga writes,

There are two difficulties, one substantial and the other truly monumental. In the first place if God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties, so that God has but one property. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; he has both power and mercifulness, say, neither of which is identical with the other. In the second place, if God is identical with each of his properties, then, since each of his properties is a property, he is a property – a self-exemplifying property. Accordingly, God has just one property: himself. This view is subject to a difficulty both obvious and overwhelming. No property could have created the world; no property could be omniscient, or, indeed, know anything at all. If God is a property, then he isn't a person but a mere abstract object; he has no knowledge, awareness, power, love or life. So taken, the simplicity doctrine seems an utter mistake»⁵⁰.

If God, being identical with His essence and having multiple properties, is identical with each of them, then, He is identical with one property and each of God's properties is identical with one another. But both are absurd for God is a person, and is neither a property nor an abstract object. Besides, all divine

⁴⁸ VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity», p. 4.

⁴⁹ Brower considers it as «the *locus classicus* for contemporary difficulties with simplicity» (BROWER, J. E., «Simplicity and Aseity», p. 2).

⁵⁰ PLANTINGA, A., *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 47.

properties are distinct from each other. Rogers insists that the claim «God is identical with His properties, is not the one found in Augustine or Anselm or Aquinas. The traditional doctrine denies that God has any properties at all. God is... an eternal, immutable, absolutely simple act»⁵¹. Even Plantinga already realizes that what he believes he has refuted *might* not be what the medievals meant. What follows is a brief inquiry on how contemporary thinkers interpret the medievals' understanding of properties, how multiple properties relate to each other and to God and how identifying God with His properties is coherent with the theistic claim that God is a person.

2.2. *Interpreting Properties*

Granting his notion of *property*, Plantinga insinuates that, since the identity claims are incoherent, something *must* be wrong with the simplicity doctrine. Some contemporary simplicity defenders think something *may* be wrong with Plantinga's notion of property⁵². Brower observes rightly that Plantinga has adopted a form of Platonic realism, which raises serious problems for the simplicity doctrine, the most serious of which is what Vallicella calls «an ontological category-mistake». Vallicella's observation is quite illuminating:

Plantinga, along with many other philosophers, thinks of individuals and properties as belonging to radically disjoint realms despite the fact that individuals exemplify properties. Individuals are causally efficacious *concreta* whereas properties are causally impotent *abstracta*. Such an approach to ontology renders the divine simplicity inconceivable from the outset. For if God is a concrete individual and his nature (conceived perhaps as the conjunction of his omni-attributes) is an abstract property, then the general ontology rules out an identity of God with his nature. Any such identity would violate the separateness of the two realms. To identify an unexemplifiable *concretum* with an exemplifiable *abstractum* would amount to an ontological category-mistake⁵³.

⁵¹ ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 166.

⁵² Brower notes that «most philosophers writing about simplicity since Plantinga have assumed that the apparent absurdity of the doctrine derives entirely from the specific conception of properties in terms of which Plantinga interprets it» (BROWER, J., «Making Sense...», p. 9). Enrique Moros analyses thoroughly Plantinga's concept of property and points out some problems it entails (cf. MOROS, E., *Modalidad y esencia: la metafísica de Alvin Plantinga*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1996, pp. 233-256).

⁵³ VALLICELLA, W. F., «Divine Simplicity», pp. 4-5.

To avoid Plantinga's interpretation, some contemporary thinkers venture into adopting other notions of property⁵⁴. William Mann holds that properties are not some Platonic abstract universals but concrete individuals or «property instances» of these universals⁵⁵. Hence, Aquinas should be interpreted as saying that God is identical with His «property instances». «What Aquinas' version of DDS (doctrine on divine simplicity) claims is that the property instance of God's being wise is identical to the property instance of God's being powerful, etc.»⁵⁶. With this, Mann hopes to avoid the absurdity of thinking that abstract entities like Wisdom and Goodness are identical with each other and that God is an abstract object.

In trying to confront the principle «No property instance is a person», latent in the objection «If God is a property-instance, He is not a person», Mann assumes that every person is a property instance since everything is an *instantiation* of its appropriate rich property. Wolterstorff criticizes him for confusing property instantiation with property exemplification. «Whereas Socrates exemplified the property, wisdom, Socrates' wisdom instantiated it... What reason is there to think that Socrates' instantiation of his rich property just is Socrates?»⁵⁷. But Mann falls into a more serious setback: if God is identical with His property instance, then, He will lack aseity, since, as Brower notes, property instances depend for their existence on universal properties that exist apart from God⁵⁸. Thomas V. Morris rightly notes that if God is a

⁵⁴ Brower rules out adopting a form of Aristotelian realism that takes properties as concrete universals for it is as problematic as the Platonic realism. Since universals are multiply exemplifiable entities, to interpret simplicity in terms of concrete universals would entail that God is both multiply exemplifiable and capable of serving as a constituent of other concrete particulars, which is absurd (cfr. BROWER, J., «Making Sense...», p. 9).

⁵⁵ Cfr. MANN, W., «Divine Simplicity», in *Religious Studies*, 18 (1982), p. 457. Wolterstorff identifies *property instances* with his *cases*, with D. C. William's *abstract particulars* and *tropes*, with Aristotle's *entities present in something*, and «at least some of them are what the medievals called *qualia*» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 96).

⁵⁶ MANN, W., «Divine Simplicity», p. 457. In the rest of his article, Mann argues that property instances in God are identical with each other.

⁵⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 97. But had Mann maintained such distinction by holding that while Socrates' wisdom *instantiates* the property «wisdom», Socrates (individual, person) *exemplifies* the property-instance (or *rich* property), it could have been a coherent theory and could have presented the considerable advantage which Moros points out: «las instancias sólo existen si existe el sujeto que las ejemplifica» (MOROS, E., *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1997, p. 142).

⁵⁸ Cfr. BROWER, J. E., «Making Sense...», p. 11.

property instance, «the clearly unacceptable consequence will follow that God is a feature of something ontologically more fundamental than himself»⁵⁹. Mann replies Morris' objection by identifying God's property with His instance of that property. Omniscience must be identical with God's omniscience⁶⁰. However, criticizing against its *ad hoc* character, Wolterstorff rejects Mann's solution because it has not done away with Plantinga's objection: «if God is identical with the property instance, *God's omniscience*, and if that property instance is identical with the property, *being omniscient*, then it follows that God is a property»⁶¹. Mann's solution fails⁶².

Another interpretation of property is to take it as a self-exemplifying substance. Vallicella grants that if properties are exemplifiable and substances are not except by themselves, then, those self-exemplifying substances qualify as properties. He argues that God is identified with His properties, construed as self-exemplifying entities⁶³. Leftow argues in similar vein that the identity claim «God=nature» does not only mean that what we previously thought to be two (substance and property) are now one single entity, which has all the characteristics properly belonging to each of them. But it may also entail that these characteristics constitute only a proper subset of those originally associated with God and His nature. Thus, we may hold that some properties are concrete particular substances capable of exemplification⁶⁴. But Brower criticizes the *ad hoc* character of these strategies. He notes that behind them is the attempt «to uphold a version of the property interpretation», something that, he suggests, we must abandon if we want to make sense of the simplicity doctrine⁶⁵. Besides, Wolterstorff flatly rejects that properties are self-exemplifying. «We hold that, in general, properties

⁵⁹ MORRIS, T. V., «On God and Mann», in *Religious Studies*, 21 (1985), p. 303.

⁶⁰ Cfr. MANN, W. E., «Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris», in *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986), p. 352.

⁶¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 99.

⁶² Vallicella also shows how Mann's solution is not viable (cfr. VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense» in *Faith and Philosophy*, 9 (1992), pp. 510-512).

⁶³ «Are there, then, any properties identical with individuals? Yes, every property whose self-exemplification entails its identity with an individual. Among these, I shall argue, are the divine attributes» (VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 514).

⁶⁴ Cfr. LEFTOW, B., «Is God an Abstract Object?», pp. 593-594. Leftow responds to Plantinga's objection saying, «Even if the Identity Thesis is true, it does not follow that God is any sort of abstract object» (p. 593).

⁶⁵ Cfr. BROWER, J. E., «Making Sense...», p. 16.

are not self-exemplifying... that knowledge does not know, that love does not love...»⁶⁶. To adopt this solution, then, is to engage in a seemingly unending debate on this question⁶⁷.

One possible alternative is to view properties in terms of what are now known as 'tropes'. Vallicella thinks it will work for tropes are ontologically simple entities. Between God and tropes we can find a number of things in common: (a) there is no distinction between the entity and its properties; (b) both are not particulars that exemplify universals; (c) in both, we have a particular that is also a property; (d) we have a subject of predication that is also a predicable entity, where the predicable entity is predicated of itself. The only difference is that «whereas God is unique, tropes are not: there is and can be only one God, but there are many redness tropes»⁶⁸.

On trope theory, properties are assayed not as universals but as particulars: the redness of a tomato is as particular, as unrepeatable, as the tomato... A trope is a simple entity in that there is no distinction between it and the property it 'has.' Thus a redness trope is red, but it is not red by instantiating redness, or by having redness as a constituent, but by being (a bit of) redness. So a trope is what it has. It has redness by being identical to (a bit of) redness. In this respect it is like God who is what he has⁶⁹.

But Brower doubts the trope theory will work in defending the simplicity doctrine. He argues that, although identifying God with a trope may avoid making Him dependent on a universal (since the theory denies that universals exist), it could not guarantee divine aseity because tropes, by nature, depend on the subjects to which they belong (and which are distinct from themselves) for their existence. However, contemporary debates on tropes are focused on the question of its essence and existence. The merit of this theory resides in

⁶⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 108. But if this is so, then, it reveals the limitation of abstract realities thus conceived, and uncovers a more difficult question on their nature. Love cannot love because it cannot exist apart from the being that loves: it has no being in itself.

⁶⁷ Smith, for instance, cites «existence» as a self-exemplifying property: «the property of existence is to say that this property is self-exemplifying» (SMITH, Q., «An Analysis of Holiness», p. 521). If so, then, existence is a first-order and a second-order property, as Smith holds. Curiously, Smith cites Plantinga, David Kaplan, among others as holding this notion of existence, contrary to Wolterstorff's claim.

⁶⁸ VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity», p. 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

redirecting our attention away from Plantinga's property interpretation back to the simplicity doctrine's central claim.

Plantinga's objection has diverted our attention from the central notion of simplicity to his own concept of property⁷⁰. He misconstrues the doctrine by treating it as telling us something about God's *having* properties when, in fact, *having* properties is what it precisely denies. «From first to last the doctrine of divine simplicity is a piece of negative or apophatic theology and not a purported description of God»⁷¹. What Aquinas claims is not that God *has* properties which are identical with His nature, but that in God, there is no ontological composition of *who* He is and *what* He has⁷². For this reason, that God is *esse* is not an identity statement similar to «Fido is a dog».

Therefore, that God is identical with His properties does not necessarily mean that God *is* a property (converting God into a property). To understand better the scope of this doctrine, we need to return to Aquinas' notion of God as Pure Act. Rogers' objection to Plantinga runs along this line⁷³. Acts are what one does; properties are what one possesses. Confusion may easily arise between the two, since, as Rogers explains, «For created beings, to do an action implies to have a property. That is, 'Sophia writes', implies 'Sophia is literate'. Sophia could not write if she did not possess the power of being

⁷⁰ Citing Ignacio Angelelli, Moros distinguishes the classical notion of *property* as *accident* from the contemporary concept as *universal abstract entities*. He points out that on the former, a *property* can be an individual with a concrete (real) being like any substance (cfr. MOROS, E., *Modalidad y esencia...*, pp. 237-238) Angelelli says that a «far-reaching consequence of the 'ontological square' is that the term 'property' becomes equivocal» (ANGELELLI, I., *Studies on Gottlob Frege and Traditional Philosophy*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht-Holland, 1967, p. 254).

⁷¹ DAVIES, B., OP, «Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», in DAVIES, B., OP (ed.), *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe*, OP, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987, p. 59. Davies also notes that the simplicity doctrine is «an exercise in 'logical grammar'; its aim is to tell us the sort of conclusions about God which are not to be drawn», namely, that He is composite». David Burrell, likewise, argues that the doctrine is «a way of remarking that no articulated form of expression can succeed in stating anything about God» (BURRELL, D., *Aquinas, God and Action*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, p. 18). Cfr. also PIEPER, J., *The Silence of Saint Thomas*, MURRAY, J. and O'CONNOR, D. (trans.), St. Augustine's Press, South Bend, Ind., 1999).

⁷² Davies' point is decisive: «to say that *who* God is cannot be something different from *what* God is» (DAVIES, B., OP, «Classical Theism...», p. 62).

⁷³ Plantinga's criticism, she says, «entirely misses the mark when the traditional doctrine is in question» for «Not only does God do things, but He just is what He does» (ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 171).

able to write. I take it that any creaturely action is the manifestation of some property, or, as Aquinas would put it, the actualization of some potential»⁷⁴. In view of this, I submit that Aquinas' notion of Pure Act –not the concept of property– is what best illuminates the simplicity doctrine. Unless we abandon the property interpretation and adopt the Thomistic view, the doctrine will always present coherence problems, the most immediate of which is the problem on multiple predicates.

2.3. *Multiple Predicates*

If God is identical with each of His essential properties, then, each of God's properties is identical with each other, so that God has but one property. But obviously God has several properties. God's omniscience and omnipotence are not identical with the other. How could we coherently apply multiple predicates to God?

Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa already have provided a substantial solution to this question. They claim that certain class of divine attributes should be viewed as *propria* (a Latin translation of a set of Greek terms –like ἴδιος, ἴδιον, ἡ ἰδιότης– that denote non-essential but necessary characteristic features of a species)⁷⁵. Radde-Gallwitz notes that this notion is a unique construal of the simplicity doctrine.

Propria necessarily inhere in the natures of which they are *propria*, and do so uniquely, such that they serve as identifying markers for those natures. Accordingly, they make possible knowledge of those natures that is not merely relative or mind-dependent—that is not merely knowledge by *epinoia* (though we should not disparage this either). Yet, at the same time, *propria* do not define the essence. God's *propria* of goodness, wisdom, power, justice, and truth do not tell us what it is to be God. God is simultaneously known and

⁷⁴ ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 172.

⁷⁵ Non-essentially necessary features include, for instance, the risibility of humans. «It is *propria* of this sort that Basil and Gregory have in mind when they use the terminology to speak of God's attributes. Just as we cannot think of a horse that cannot neigh, we cannot think of God without goodness. The ability to neigh is no part of the essence of a horse. Yet, it is a necessary truth that if something is a horse, it is able to neigh, and if something is able to neigh, it is a horse. Thus, there is a kind of non-essential necessity with properties of this sort, which distinguishes them from strictly accidental properties» (RADDE-GALLWITZ, A., *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa...*, p. xx).

unknown, and part of the theological task is stating clearly where the lines are drawn between these⁷⁶.

The approach that Stump and Kretzmann decide on makes use of Gottlob Frege's famous distinction between sense and reference⁷⁷. That God is utterly simple does not preclude the conceptual distinction of His actions in the world from one another and from God Himself. Hence, what the simplicity doctrine entails is that we take all the names of God's multiple predicates as «identical in reference but different in sense, referring in various ways to the one actual entity which is God himself or designating various manifestations of it»⁷⁸.

«Perfect power» and «perfect knowledge» are precise analogues for «the morning star» and «the evening star»: non-synonymous expressions designating quite distinct manifestations of one and the same thing... «Perfect power is identical with perfect knowledge» does not entail that power is identical with knowledge any more than the fact that the summit of a mountain's east slope is identical with the summit of its west slope entails the identity of the slopes⁷⁹.

Vallicella has a point in criticizing this view as «confusing, employing as it does two distinct analogies that are dubious in themselves and not obviously compatible with each other»⁸⁰. Indeed, comparing the multiple divine predicates to Frege's «modes of presentation» (*Darstellungsweisen*), like the analogy of «morning star» and the «evening star», entails a dilemma. The Fregean analogy, he wisely observes, «requires the distinctness of senses in order to account for the informativeness of the identity claim»⁸¹. Thus, either these predicates are *senses* –in which case, they must be really distinct from each

⁷⁶ RADDE-GALLWITZ, A., *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa...*, p. 225. «Basil and Gregory's account of this», says Radde-Gallwitz, «has what I take to be the virtue of simultaneously affirming the absolute reliability of human knowledge of God (since knowledge of *propria* is not 'partial' in the sense of knowing a 'part') and the necessary limitation of that knowledge (since knowing *propria* is different from knowing essential definitions)» (p. 17).

⁷⁷ Cfr. FREGE, G., «On Sense and Reference», in MOORE, A.W. (ed.), *Meaning and Reference*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 23-42.

⁷⁸ STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Absolute Simplicity», p. 356.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁸⁰ VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 509.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

other— or not. But if they are not *senses*, what makes them distinct so as to account for the identity claim?

Mann suggests that multiple properties confer causal powers on the entities that exemplify them. He says, «*P* is a property of an object, *x*, only if *P*'s presence in *x* confers some causal power(s) on *x*. *P* and *Q* are the same property if and only if (1) *P* and *Q* confer the same causal powers on their objects and (2) whatever is sufficient to bring about an instance of *P* in an object, *x*, is sufficient to bring about an instance of *Q* in *x*, and vice versa»⁸². But obviously this proposal will not work, since, how can properties confer causal powers if they are abstract objects, hence, causally inert?

Vallicella's solution seems promising. After establishing —*contra* Plantinga— that some self-exemplifying properties can be individuals⁸³, he suggests that divine attributes are properties «whose self-exemplification entails its identity with an individual»⁸⁴. To explain their mutual identity, Vallicella shows that they are coextensive. He argues that: (a) «Each divine attribute, as both self-exemplifying and such that its possessor cannot be non-conscious, is identical with some individual or other; (b) Necessarily, the divine attributes are coextensive; (c) Therefore, there is exactly one individual with which each attribute is identical; therefore, by Transitivity of Identity, (d) the attributes are identical with each other»⁸⁵. Unlike Mann's view, which claims that coextensive properties are necessarily identical, Vallicella holds that the reason divine attributes are identical with each other is that «each divine attribute is identical with an individual, and the individuals are identical with one another»⁸⁶. Lastly, since divine attributes are not multiply exemplifiable, as

⁸² MANN, W., «Simplicity and Properties», p. 352.

⁸³ Defining *individual* (I) as that which (a) exemplifies properties, (b) is not multiply exemplifiable, and (c) is not exemplified by anything distinct from itself, and *property* (P) as that which is exemplified, Vallicella claims that these definitions allow «for some properties to be identical with individuals. For if property Q were exemplifiable only by itself it would count as a property according to (P) but also as an individual according to (I)... Such a property would be both a property and an individual» (VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 513).

⁸⁴ As an example, Vallicella cites omniscience. «It is not obviously self-exemplifying (like that existence exists or self-identity is self-identical), but it is not obviously non-self-exemplifying either (like the property of being a teacher of Plato). So the theist is not barred by logic or any canon of coherence from taking the view that omniscience is self-exemplifying. If it is self-exemplifying, then omniscience is omniscient; but not only that, omniscience = an omniscient *individual*» (VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 514).

⁸⁵ VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 515.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

stipulated in the definition of *individual*, «it follows that each divine attribute is a haecceity»⁸⁷.

Granting without arguing Vallicella's claim –*contra* Plantinga– on the possibility of self-exemplifying properties and that some properties are individuals, his account may be acceptable to explain the ontological identity between God and His properties, and among God's properties. But what would account for their distinction or multiplicity? In his critique against Stump and Kretzmann, Vallicella rejects any conceptual distinction saying, «It will not help to say that omniscience and omnipotence differ as concepts («in the mind») but are identical as properties («outside the mind»), for even if this is true, it has not been explained how the properties can be identical with one another and with God. The problem is one of metaphysics, not of philosophy of language»⁸⁸. However, in addressing the metaphysical problem of identity, Vallicella runs the risk of neglecting that which distinguishes the properties from each other and from God, i.e., that which confers meaning to affirmations like «God is just» and «God is merciful».

While acknowledging that the problem is, firstly, ontological, Aquinas' solution seems to indicate that it is also epistemological and linguistic. To attribute multiple predicates to an absolutely simple God, we must distinguish first between God as considered in Himself and God as known to us.

God, however, as considered in Himself, is altogether one and simple, yet our intellect knows Him by different conceptions because it cannot see Him as He is in Himself. Nevertheless, although it understands Him under different conceptions, it knows that one and the same simple object corresponds to its conceptions. Therefore the plurality of predicate and subject represents the plurality of idea; and the intellect represents the unity by composition⁸⁹.

Our concepts of God represent Him imperfectly because (a) our intellect cannot apprehend God «as He is in Himself», and (b) these concepts come from

⁸⁷ «Thus, omniscience is the property of being identical to the omniscient being. Given that omniscience is self-exemplifying, it follows that the property of being identical to the omniscient being is identical to the omniscient being» (VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 516).

⁸⁸ VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 510.

⁸⁹ *S. Th.* I, q. 13, a. 12. In this text, we may already notice that, for Aquinas, divine simplicity is an exigency of reason.

our knowledge of creatures. This accounts for the distinction and the multiplicity of divine predicates⁹⁰. Although we think of God under a multiplicity of predicates, our intellect knows that these refer only to «one and the same object». It is because «Our intellect cannot comprehend simple subsisting forms, as they really are in themselves; but it apprehends them as compound things in which there is something taken as subject and something that is inherent. Therefore it apprehends the simple form as a subject, and attributes something else to it»⁹¹.

Augustine argues in the same vein when he says that «God is more truly thought than he is spoken of and is more truly than he is thought»⁹². Roland J. Teske observes that Augustine's distinction between *dicere*, *cogitare* and *esse* allows one «to hold that there is a multiplicity of terms used in speaking of God and that there is a multiplicity of meanings for those terms, though the being of God is simple»⁹³. What Augustine reminds us of is that we must not think of God as we speak of Him, since not even our thought of God is equal to His being. We may attribute greatness and goodness to God, but these attributes are not a quantity or a quality distinct from God that inheres in Him as in a subject. Augustine claims that the multiple predicates of God are not incompatible with the divine simplicity⁹⁴. He presupposes that God is not only spoken of in multiple terms (*multipliciter dicitur*) but also in multiple senses (*multiplicitur cogitatur*) since these terms have different meanings. However, «one and the same reality is expressed, whether God is said to be eternal or immortal or incorruptible or immutable»⁹⁵. Thus, as Teske concludes,

though our speech and our thoughts about God are multiple, the being of God is simple, for what the different terms with their different meanings

⁹⁰ Marilyn Adams sums up Aquinas' premises into three: «(1) that it makes sense to suppose that for some *a* and *b*, *a* and *b* are really the same but distinct *rationes* or conceived objects; (2) that a thing with no distinguishable constituents of any sort can genuinely correspond to a plurality of distinct conceived objects or *rationes*; and (3) that the human intellect is not capable in this life of forming concepts that apply univocally to God and creatures». William Ockham tries to refute (1) saying it commits a category mistake. Duns Scotus attacks (2) and (3) trying to prove otherwise. (For a concise discussion of Aquinas' solution to the problem of attribution and its critiques, see ADAMS, M., *William Ockham*, vol. II, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1987, pp. 914-931).

⁹¹ S. TH. I, q. 13, a. 12, ad. 2.

⁹² AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, 7, 4, 7.

⁹³ TESKE, R. J., *To know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of St. Augustine*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D. C., 2008, p. 111.

⁹⁴ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, 15, 5, 8.

⁹⁵ AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, 15, 5, 7.

refer to is one and the same reality. Thus, the doctrine of divine simplicity is not a doctrine about our speech about God or about our thoughts about God, but about the being of God⁹⁶.

The problem of multiple predicates arises when the metaphysical and the epistemological spheres get confused so that the simplicity doctrine is construed as saying «that properties which are different are not different when God has them»⁹⁷. The distinction is epistemological while the identity is metaphysical. But when multiple predicates are taken as ontologically existing abstract entities, coherence problems are inevitable. Aquinas holds that each predicate signifies a perfection that both Creator and creature share. Weigel notes that «this raises the question of what features inhering in created things would have in common with the divine reality»⁹⁸. As Marilyn Adams suggests, the real issue is not that multiple predicates imply composition but how the identity of the perfection signified is maintained as applied to both Creator and creatures. This necessarily calls for a theory of predication that accounts for both the epistemological distinction and the metaphysical identity of multiple predicates.

Aquinas' doctrine of analogical predication and his theory of participation could answer Adams' query. God is absolutely one and simple because He is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. Yet, multiple predicates which signify perfections known through creation can be attributed *analogically* to God, not only because they relate to Him as the effects to their cause, but also as participants to the participated. «Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God»⁹⁹. The attribution is analogical because in creatures, these are participated perfections, but in God, they are identical with His Being. They *must* be identical, I would say, to God's Being, for composition is unworthy of a truly divine being¹⁰⁰. Viewed from this perspective, multiple divine predicates cannot render the simplicity doctrine incoherent.

⁹⁶ TESKE, R. J., *To know God and the Soul...*, p. 97.

⁹⁷ Davies believes this is how Plantinga construes the multiple predicates in God (cfr. DAVIES, B., OP, «Classical Theism...», p. 58).

⁹⁸ WEIGEL, P., «Divine Simplicity», p. 11.

⁹⁹ *S. TH.* I, q. 13, a. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Cfr. *S. TH.* I, q. 3, a. 7. Aquinas discusses five ways by which God must be absolutely simple. Adams discusses four motives for the simplicity doctrine and all of them gears around the idea of composition as unworthy of a truly divine being (cfr. ADAMS, M., *William Ockham*, vol. II, pp. 903-908).

2.4. *Predicating Existence*

Among God's multiple predicates, predicating existence is especially problematic. Simplicity critics argue that if God's multiple properties are identical with one another, then God has only one property. Now, suppose that this one property is simplicity. God, then, cannot possess the property of existence. If He is simple, he does not exist, and if he exists, he is not simple¹⁰¹. The identity claim between God's essence and His existence is, in Christopher Hughes' words, «perhaps the single most baffling claim Aquinas makes about God»¹⁰². Anthony Kenny is even harsher in shrugging it off as «nothing but sophistry and illusion»¹⁰³. A. N. Prior describes the claim as a «bad grammar, a combining of words that fails to make them *mean*-like 'cat no six'»¹⁰⁴.

But far from being meaningless, Barry Miller argues that the identity claim on God's essence and existence makes sense only when it is understood in terms of *limit cases* rather than *limit simpliciter*¹⁰⁵. «'God is His existence' is to be understood as: 'The limit case instance of an individual = the limit case instance of existence'»¹⁰⁶. Miller argues that only when the concept of existence as a real property of concrete individuals is understood well, we may appreciate the notion of Subsistent Existence as something «basic to an appreciation of God's nature and simplicity»¹⁰⁷.

Miller rightly notes that the problem of predicating existence hinges on the question «What does it mean *to be* or *to exist*?»¹⁰⁸ The crux of the matter

¹⁰¹ Cfr. VALLICELLA, W., «Divine Simplicity: A New Defense», p. 509.

¹⁰² HUGHES, C., *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God*, p. 4. Hughes argues that «Aquinas' full-strength conception of divine simplicity is unworkable, although a weakened and reconstructed conception may not be» (p. ix).

¹⁰³ KENNY, A., *Aquinas on Being*, p. 194. The same verdict he gives to Aquinas' thesis in KENNY, A., *Aquinas*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ PRIOR, A. N., «Can Religion Be Discussed?», in FLEW, A. and MACINTYRE, A. (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, S.C.M. Press, London, 1955, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ «A basic difference between a limit *simpliciter* and a limit *case* is that the former differs merely in degree from that of which it is a limit *simpliciter*, whereas the latter differs absolutely from that of which it is a limit *case*: the limit *simpliciter* of an F is an F, whereas the limit *case* of an F is decidedly not an F» (MILLER, B., *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1996, p. 7).

¹⁰⁶ MILLER, B., *A Most Unlikely God...*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14. For Miller's argument on existence as a *real* property, see also MILLER, B., *From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument*, Routledge, London, 1992, Chapter 4, pp. 64-78.

¹⁰⁸ In some languages, the predicate 'is' does duty for 'exists', and even in English there are archaic uses of 'is' in that role (cfr. MILLER, B., «Existence» in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

is centered on whether or not existence is predicate that can be added to a subject. Arguments for each of the opposing views have considerably enlivened the contemporary debates, on which the plight of the simplicity doctrine's coherence question rests.

In the contemporary analytic tradition to which Wolterstorff himself admittedly is inscribed, the predominant view on the question may be summarized in two theses: (1) the Frege-Russell distinction of the four different meanings of «is», namely, *existential*, *predicative*, *identificatory*, and *generic implication*¹⁰⁹; and (2) the claim that existence is not a predicate, or to be exact, existence is not a first-level property¹¹⁰. From this, one could already anticipate why, on the ground of existence, the simplicity doctrine is incoherent for analytic philosophers.

Although, as Alejandro Llano notes, most contemporary analysts admit that existence can be a predicate, they take it as a peculiar predicate and not a *real* one¹¹¹. To take existence as a real predicate seems to entail a double dilemma: a «referential tautology» and a «referential contradiction»¹¹². If existence were a real property, then, «Socrates exists» would be redundant. Affirmative existential statements like this would give rise to «the ludicrous situation described by David Londey who invited us to ‘reflect on the absurdity of a farmer who daily inspected his flock with the aim of sorting the existing from the non-existent ones – searching for the stigmata of existence’»¹¹³. Besides,

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/existence/>> [Last consulted: October 12, 2011], p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ For example: «Socrates is» (existential), «Ciceron is Tully» (identificatory); «Socrates is wise» (predicative); and «Man is an animal» (generic implication) (cfr. MILLER, B., «Existence», p. 3).

¹¹⁰ C. J. F. Williams devotes his book «to showing that ‘_exists’ or ‘_is’ cannot be a first-level predicate» (WILLIAMS, C. J. F., *What is Existence?*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981, p. 181).

¹¹¹ David Pears claims that «existence is a peculiar kind of predicate» (PEARS, D. F., «Is Existence a Predicate?» in STRAWSON, P. F. (ed.), *Philosophical Logic*, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 100). Llano examines both opposing claims in LLANO, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, ALBRECHT, J. W. (trans. & ed.), Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, Germany, 2005, Chapter III, «Being and Existence», pp. 185-254. Miller says that three misconceptions surrounding the notion of existence must be dispelled in order to appreciate better the notion of God as Subsistent Existence. First is the claim that existence is not a predicate. Second, if it were, it would be just a «Cambridge property». Third, if it were a real property, it would be the most impoverished of real properties (cfr. MILLER, B., *A Most Unlikely God*, pp. 15-16).

¹¹² PEARS, D. F., «Is Existence a Predicate?», p. 98.

¹¹³ LONDEY, D. G., «Existence», in *Philosophia Arbusiensis*, 1 (1970), p. 3, cited by MILLER, B., *From Existence to God*, p. 64.

negative existential propositions like «Santa Claus does not exist» would generate a paradox for, if «exists» were a predicate, then its negation would also be one. Paradoxically, «does not exist» could be attributed to Santa Claus only if he did exist.

Presumably, those who deny that existence is a predicate appeal to Frege's thesis that existence is not a property of individuals, but rather, of concepts: that it is a second-level predicate¹¹⁴. «Affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but the denial of the number nought»¹¹⁵. In language, existence is properly represented, not by a predicate «exists» but by a quantifier «there exists» or «there is». The proposition «Leo Sachse is» should be understood to mean that «There is at least one thing that is identical with Leo Sachse». In this sense, nothing is being predicated of Leo Sachse. However, something is predicated of the property (or concept) of being identical with Leo Sachse¹¹⁶. Now, by assigning this quantifier to concepts, the double dilemma of referential tautology and contradiction can be avoided¹¹⁷.

However, existence may *not exclusively* be a property of concepts only. There can be a lot of sense by which existence is a first-level predicate, a *real* property of things. Miller argues that '___exists' can also be predicated

¹¹⁴ For Frege, concepts and objects are ontological items. «A concept is the reference of a predicate; an object is something that can never be the whole reference of a predicate, but can be the reference of a subject» (FREGE, G., «On Concept and Object», in *Posthumous Writings*, HERMES, H., KAMBARTEL, F. and KAULBACK, F. (eds.), LONG, P. and WHITE, R. (trans.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, pp. 100, 105). Predicates attached to singular terms in a proposition that says something about the objects to which those terms refer are called first-level predicates or concept expressions. They refer to first-level concepts. Predicates attached to first-level predicates to form propositions that say something about the concept to which the first-level predicate refers are called second-level predicates. They refer to second-level concepts. Existence belongs to this latter category.

¹¹⁵ FREGE, G., *The Foundations of Arithmetic: a logico-mathematical enquiry into the concept of number* (Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik: eine logisch mathematische Untersuchung über den Begriff der Zahl), 2nd rev. ed., AUSTIN, J.L. (trans.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1959, p. 65e. «The proposition that there exists no rectangular equilateral rectilinear triangle does state a property of the concept 'rectangular equilateral rectilinear triangle'; it assigns to it the number nought» (p. 64e).

¹¹⁶ Cfr. FREGE, G., «Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence», in *Posthumous Writings*, HERMES, H., KAMBARTEL, F. and KAULBACK, F. (eds.), LONG, P. and WHITE, R. (trans.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, pp. 53-67.

¹¹⁷ Llano notes that Frege's proposal «provides a coherent interpretation of Kant's thesis» which says that existence is not a real predicate (cfr. LLANO, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, p. 189). That existence is a property of concepts does not mean that concepts exist but that 'exists' is of concepts, not of things.

of individuals and is not merely a Cambridge property and that the alleged absurdities and paradoxes stem not from taking existence as a real property but from taking its negation to be one¹¹⁸. Now, to deny that «does not exist» is a property does not necessarily lead to the denial of existence as a property, unless one holds that «understandable but mistaken belief that the two denials are inseparable»¹¹⁹. On the other hand, the suggestion that non-existence is a real property rests on whether or not negative existential propositions («Santa Claus does not exist») contains a negative existential predicate, and this predicate stands for a real property. Miller claims neither assumption proves true.

Employing the distinction between internal or predicate negation and external or propositional negation, Miller says the negative existential proposition «Socrates does not exist» can be rendered as «It is not the case that (Socrates exists)» in which, what is predicated of Socrates is existence, not its negation. He argues that no negative predicate, then, could stand for a real property and concludes that «no matter whether the distinction between internal and external negation in this context were accepted or rejected, the result would be the same... In neither case, therefore, would 'Socrates does not exist' generate the paradoxes or absurdities which would make it impossible to count 'exists' as a first-level predicate and existence as a real property of individuals»¹²⁰.

Analyzing thoroughly Frege's thesis, Llano finds out that «existence as a property of the concept under which at least one object falls, refers to the existence of the object itself, which, being presupposed by the application of the existential quantifier, can no longer be expressed by the second level existential predicate»¹²¹. He, then, concludes that there is another sense of existence that refers not only to concepts but to objects¹²². He notes that analytic philosophy refuses to recognize this second sense. Instead, it restricts itself exclusively to the first sense «and every time it approaches the second it immediately draws

¹¹⁸ For Miller's thorough discussion, see MILLER, B., *From Existence to God*, pp. 64-78.

¹¹⁹ MILLER, B., «Existence», p. 19.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹²¹ LLANO, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, p. 202.

¹²² Llano says, «If we admit the clear distinction Frege makes between concept and object, the existence that is predicated of objects must clearly be distinct from that which is predicated of concepts» (LLANO, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, p. 210).

back to imprison itself in the first. Thus it never poses the decisive question ‘What does existence mean for a real thing?’ in any depth»¹²³.

Existence as a second-level predicate also faces serious flaws. First, «exists» could be taken to mean «instantiates», so that «Dinosaurs exist» would mean «The property of being a dinosaur is instantiated at least once». But a serious difficulty takes place in accepting the affirmation «Socrates exists» to mean «The property of being Socrates is instantiated at least once» because individuals cannot be instantiated. As Miller rightly claims, «Rather than being themselves instantiable they are the kind of thing in which instantiations occur, e.g. wisdom is instantiated in Socrates, but Socrates himself cannot be instantiated in anything»¹²⁴.

Second, some philosophers also argue for the distinction of «exists» from «is», a position that is directly at odds with the Fregean view which identifies «there exists» and «there is». Terence Parsons distinguishes objects that *are* from objects that *exist*. He uses «exists» to refer to «all the ordinary physical (concrete) objects that we normally take to exist (tables, chairs), and it does *not* include unicorns, gold mountains, winged horses, round squares (round square things), Pegasus, or Sherlock Holmes»¹²⁵. For Parsons, the latter concrete objects are said not to exist – they are *nonexistent*, but merely *are*. He argues that what exists does not exhaust what there is¹²⁶. For this reason, Miller comments, «it is then possible to say without any kind of contradiction, or even paradox, ‘There are unicorns, but they do not exist’»¹²⁷. Edward N. Zalta likewise distinguishes «exists» from «is», taking the former as a first-level predicate while the latter is predicated of abstract entities. Contrary to Parsons, «is» is represented by ‘ \exists ’, indicating that it is a second-level predicate¹²⁸.

¹²³ LLANO, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, p. 247. On this point, Llano cites Fernando Inciarte saying «As long as linguistic analysis does not completely abandon a positivistic spirit it will be unable to provide a response to the question, since that response would drag metaphysics along behind it» (INCIARTE, F., *El reto del positivismo lógico*, Rialp, Madrid, 1974, pp. 130-131). (English translation by James Albrecht).

¹²⁴ MILLER, B., «Existence», p. 23.

¹²⁵ PARSONS, T., *Nonexistent Objects*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980, p. 11.

¹²⁶ He says that both «Tables exist» and «There are tables» can be symbolized in the same way as $(\exists x) Tx$, only if we equate the quantifier «there is» with «there exists», «an equation which makes sense only if what exists exhausts what there is; and that is the metaphysical view I am now questioning» (PARSONS, T., *Nonexistent Objects*, p. 6).

¹²⁷ MILLER, B., «Existence», p. 29.

¹²⁸ For a comparison between Parsons’ and Zalta’s position, see MILLER, B., «Existence», pp. 28-33.

In the face of this ongoing debate, one's initial reaction would be to find a common ground that allows mutual understanding and even reconciliation of two apparently opposing views. Following Llano, I think recognizing the two main senses of existence –existence as a propositional (second-level) predicate and existence as a first-level predicate (Aquinas' act of being)– could provide such ground¹²⁹. It allows us to see that nothing in the assumption of existence as a real predicate opposes to its consideration as a propositional predicate, for, as Aquinas says, «'To be' can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of essence, or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject. Taking 'to be' in the first sense, we cannot understand God's existence nor His essence; but only in the second sense. We know that this proposition which we form about God when we say 'God is', is true; and this we know from His effects»¹³⁰. On this Thomistic distinction, existence is viewed not only as a Frege-Kantian property, but also as an act¹³¹.

Unless one keeps a prudent distance from insisting exclusively on the Kantian tendency of separating existence from reality and on the Fregean encasement of existence in concepts, the question on predicating existence would be far from being resolved and it would be too hasty to reject the simplicity doctrine as incoherent merely on the ground that predicating existence to God is problematic¹³². Can such rejection be warranted under the premise that God is a person?

2.5. *God as a Person*

As we shall see, the attribution of the concept of person to God requires careful qualification, for as Weigel rightly observes, «referring to God as a

¹²⁹ Llano discusses Aquinas' distinction between veridical existence and being as act in LLANO, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, pp. 226-254. Weigel presents Aquinas' response to this problem as involving the distinction between «being» in the predication and «being» in reality (cfr. WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, pp. 68-78).

¹³⁰ S. TH. I, q. 3, a. 4, *ad 2*. Aquinas clarifies that «not everything which are beings in the second way are also beings in the first way» (like in privations). Considering this distinction, I think, would shed much light on the problem of divine simplicity.

¹³¹ David B. Burrell holds that simplicity doctrine can only be construed coherently if we «conceive existence as *act* (not *an act*) perfecting the essence as form does matter» (cfr. BURRELL, D., «Distinguishing God from the World», p. 85).

¹³² Weigel says that, without necessarily getting philosophers to agree on what ultimately existence is, a sensible reading of the claim that God is His existence is possible. It simply means that God is radically independent and absolutely perfect. That God is Subsistent Existence underscores God's absolute simplicity (cfr. WEIGEL, P., «Divine Simplicity», p. 11).

person is more complicated than one might think»¹³³. The most fundamental problem comes from the concept itself, its origin and application to God¹³⁴. Obviously, a thorough understanding of the varied sense with which the concept is used in philosophy and theology is indispensable for the accurate comprehension of the claim that God is a person¹³⁵. Besides, a question looms on whether the notion of divine personhood must determine the understanding of human personhood, or is it the other way around. In other words, does our notion of God as a person determines our idea of human person? Or is our idea of human person determines our idea of God as person? Plantinga's objection does not seem to give a clear indication with respect to these questions¹³⁶.

Originally, the term *person*, under the Roman law was used to refer to someone who is the subject of rights and responsibilities. In the Christian era, with its doctrine of man being created in the image and likeness of God, the term refers to man's preeminence due to this dignity. In particular, the understanding of the notion of person becomes more profound and crystallized in the theological reflections of the Fathers of the Church, especially in the development and defense of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas¹³⁷.

¹³³ WEIGEL, P., «Divine Simplicity», p. 8.

¹³⁴ Richard Swinburne observes that some philosophers, for various reasons, prefer to describe God as «personal but not a person», avoiding in this way numerous problems (cfr. SWINBURNE, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 99).

¹³⁵ Stanley Rudman says «In its long history, 'person' has meant a number of things» (RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1997, p. 4). Rudman's book is a thorough analysis of the concept of personhood, its application to God and human beings, and its relation to Christian ethic.

¹³⁶ For Plantinga, God has knowledge and will and God acts; hence, He is a person. Now, since our model for knowing, willing and acting is the human person, it seems that Plantinga's model for *person* is the human being. Davies argues, «If people are our models for persons, then in an obvious sense God, it would seem, is not a person» (DAVIES, B., OP, «Classical Theism...», p. 65).

¹³⁷ The meaning of the Latin verb *personare*, which means «to make loud, continuous, pervasive noise» could be traced from the Greek *pròsopon*, which literally means «face» or «mask» and is derived from Greek theatre, in which actors on a stage wore masks to reveal their character and emotional state to the audience. It could also be traced from the expression «*per se sonans*» (one who has a voice by himself), from which the Roman law's definition of person is derived: *persona est sui iuris et alteri incommunicabilis*. For a more detailed discussion of the history of the term «person», see SELLÉS, J. F., *La persona humana: introducción e historia*, Parte I, Universidad de Sabana, Colombia, 1998. See also GARCÍA CUADRADO, J. A., *Antropología filosófica: una introducción a la filosofía del hombre*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2004, pp. 119-124.

Assuming Boethius' classical definition, but giving it a more profound interpretation, Aquinas defines *person* as *subsistens rationale* or all subsistent being with a rational nature¹³⁸. For him, person is an individual substance that possesses its own being. By the term *subsistence*, Aquinas emphasizes the incommunicability and individuality of this substance. He adds that such subsistent being is of rational nature, which means that, in the first place, the individual substance is distinguished from its nature of which it is the suppositum, and secondly, by being rational, it is open to the world that surrounds it. This distinction between nature and its suppositum enables the Angelic Doctor to affirm that actions belong to the suppositum, not to the nature¹³⁹.

The Scholastic account views *person* in terms of being: the radical nature of personhood resides in the personal act of being. At the advent of Cartesian rationalism, the term *person* is founded, not anymore on the act of being, but on the faculties of thinking and their corresponding operations. Person is now understood in terms of self-consciousness. This understanding of *person* in terms of *doing*, rather than of *being*, extends even in the contemporary milieu¹⁴⁰. In his analysis of what is meant by 'person', Richard Swinburne assumes that a person is «an individual who thought and perhaps talked, made moral judgments, wanted this and not that, knew things, favored this suppliant and not that, etc.»¹⁴¹. If an individual *does* all these, among others, then it is natural to call him a «person». I assume that it is in this context that we may interpret Plantinga and Wolterstorff's view that God is a person.

According to this view, persons are not abstract objects but are composite and changeable. They have intellect and will – faculties which involve composition and a temporal sequence of states. Hence, no person is absolutely simple. As David Hume argues, «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

¹³⁸ Cfr. S. TH. I, q. 29, a. 1. Person is «*naturae rationalis individual substantia*» (cfr. BOETHIUS, *Liber de persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, c. 3).

¹³⁹ Cfr. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, c. 35, ANDERSON, J. F., BOURKE, V. J. and O'NEIL, C. J. (trans.), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2001-2003. (From here on, *SCG*); cfr. also S. TH. III, q. 2, a. 2.

¹⁴⁰ «Ya en la filosofía contemporánea se sigue afirmando la radicalidad personal no en el ser, sino en el obrar» (GARCÍA CUADRADO, J. A., *Antropología filosófica...*, p. 122).

¹⁴¹ SWINBURNE, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 102.

hatred; or, in a word, is no mind at all»¹⁴². But it is a unanimously embraced tenet that God is doubtlessly a person. Then, He is obviously not simple.

What becomes quite clear in this view is that the model concept of person applied to the divinity is the human personhood. But if this observation is correct, then we are faced with two serious setbacks: for while human persons are embodied and temporal, God is disembodied and timeless. But how can the concept of human personhood be a model for divine personhood, or vice versa, without falling into these pitfalls¹⁴³?

On the problem of embodiment, Swinburne's solution is to show the coherence of the claim that the concept of personhood does not require material embodiment. If it succeeds, then, it would be non-problematic to affirm: «That God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism»¹⁴⁴. Rudman, however, rejects Swinburne's solution alleging that embodiment is an essential feature of the notion of person. «There are good reasons for the emphasis on embodiment. The persons we are most familiar with, other human agents, are, without exception, embodied. And the body plays a crucial role in philosophical discussions of personal identity... in opting to defend the idea of God as a bodiless person, Swinburne is turning his back on one of the most essential features of a person»¹⁴⁵. Besides, the notion of a disembodied person, says Rudman, «is not consonant with the main tenor of biblical revelation»¹⁴⁶. He suggests that we view God as an embodied person, but taking embodiment in terms of in non-corporeal terms. He calls it «non-corporeal embodiment»¹⁴⁷. But how can we identify God's embodiment non-corporeally?

¹⁴² HUME, D., *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, POPKIN, R. (ed.), Hackett, Indianapolis, IN, 1980, part 4.

¹⁴³ Stanley Rudman points out «a stronger thesis» which claims that «the conception of divine personhood should be, or, even more strongly, is determinative of, the understanding of human personhood...» and that this thesis faces also these two serious problems (RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person...*, p. 145).

¹⁴⁴ SWINBURNE, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁵ RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person...*, p. 148). Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, in a very substantial collection of essays, have gathered recent philosophical explorations of the nature of persons from the idealist, dualist, materialist, immaterialist and Christian perspectives (see VAN INWAGEN, P. and ZIMMERMANN, D. (eds.), *Persons: Human and Divine*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007).

¹⁴⁶ RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person...*, p. 149.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148. Rudman cites Jonathan Harrison's article in which the latter discusses five things we mean when we say that this body is my body: (1) it is a source of sensations, (2) the inside of this body is experienced, (3) its parts can be moved directly, (4) it is my vantage-point in observ-

Rudman cites P. F. Strawson's idea of construing individual person as «a unified and embodied personal agent» by avoiding the traditional mind-body dualism. Now, in identifying God's «non-corporeal embodiment», Rudman suggests the story-relative mode of identification, in which God is identified as an embodied personal agent in His relationship with all the characters of an empirically grounded narrative. This mode of identification, says Rudman, allows us to identify God as 'Creator and Redeemer' within the Jewish and Christian narratives. He notes,

If narrative-relative identification offers a promising way forward, then, although there is no neutral identification of God –how could there be?– we can understand divine embodiment and agency on two different levels: in terms of Incarnation and the narratives reporting this. It is true that, on this view, God is not embodied in exactly the same way as the human person, except in the Incarnation, but the numerous problems of substance dualism can be genuinely overcome, and it is possible to attribute personhood to God and human agents in a non-equivocal sense¹⁴⁸.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the merits of Rudman's claim. But let it be pointed out that his effort to preserve the conceptual link between person and embodiment that would allow the non-equivocal attribution of personhood to both God and human beings, avoiding along the way the problem of substance dualism (God has no body; human beings are embodied), is quite congruent with Plantinga's objection and with Wolterstorff's notion of God as a person. What is not quite clear is whether Wolterstorff thinks along Rudman's notion of «non-corporeal divine embodiment». But like Rudman, Wolterstorff also tends to attribute univocally the concept of personhood to God and human beings. And he does so with the hope of maintaining consonance with what he claims to be the biblical concept of God. Such consonance with the biblical tradition is further upheld in his notion of

ing the world, and (5) it affects my thoughts and feelings (cfr. HARRISON, J., «The Embodiment of Mind, or what use is having a body?», in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 74 (1974), pp. 33-55. Although Swinburne has reservations regarding the fifth, he concedes that «a person has a body if there is a material object to which he is related in all of the above five ways... and presumably that he is embodied only to some degree» if he is related to a material object «in only some of these ways» (SWINBURNE, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 99).

¹⁴⁸ RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person...*, p. 151.

divine eternity – an argument that, in fact, Rudman cites to support his answer to the second objection to God’s personhood, namely, that God is timeless while persons are temporal.

It seems that timelessness and personhood are two contradicting attributes of God. For as J. R. Lucas notes, «To say that God is outside time, as many theologians do, is to deny, in effect, that God is a person»¹⁴⁹. Now, if God, as the Bible presents Him, is a person who intervenes in human history, then divine timelessness would be counterintuitive. Lucas argues that if we want to sustain divine personhood, we have to let go of divine timelessness or at least, suggest a mitigated explanation of divine eternity that would still allow the attribution of time-related activities to God.

Rudman admits that God transcends time. But he maintains that the notion of timelessness is insufficient to explain God’s intervention in history¹⁵⁰. What seems to be inchoate in Rudman is elucidated in Wolterstorff when the latter argues that divine eternity should not be understood in terms of timelessness but of an endless time: God is not eternal but everlasting. Although he tries to back up this claim with some analysis on the nature of time, Wolterstorff’s main ground of espousing divine everlastingness is obviously biblical. The Bible presents God as a being who acts within temporal succession. If, indeed, He is a person, then, He must not be timeless but everlasting¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁹ Lucas writes: «The Absolute, *to on*, the Form of the Good, or even, perhaps, the Ground of our Being, may be outside time, and timeless in a full-blooded Platonic sense, but they are not persons: they neither see what we are, nor hearken unto our prayers, nor care what we do, let alone intervene in the course of the world’s events. If we think of God as a living person, who acts in the world, or even who is merely conscious, we must seem to be ready to apply temporal expressions to Him, because the applicability of temporal predicates of some sort or other is a necessary condition of activity, even the inactive activity of consciousness» (LUCAS, J. R., *Treatise on Time and Space*, Methuen, 1973, p. 300).

¹⁵⁰ «God is not in time as creatures are in time, however, and it is important to note significant ways in which God transcends time. God is to be understood as the ground, or creator, of time... God is the Lord of time, not subject to its vicissitudes in the way that human beings are. Although he does not determine the details of every event or prevent free agency, he is not limited by the passage and ravages of time... God, as understood by Christians, is a God who intervenes in history and is capable of exercising initiative in relation to our temporal existence. This means that God’s relation to time is not adequately conveyed by ‘timelessness’... God is not subject to measured time, but neither is he simply above time or timeless» (RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person...*, p. 157).

¹⁵¹ A detailed treatment of his theory is discussed in *Divine Eternity, Awareness and Action* of this chapter.

As we have seen, in order to preserve a non-equivocal attribution of personhood across the human and divine sphere, or at least their own concept of personhood, these thinkers are willing to modify the concepts of embodiment and eternity. Despite these efforts, a feeling of disappointment endures. Rudman articulates it accurately: «In terms of embodiment and temporality, it is clear that God is not physically embodied or literally in/subject to time. There are good reasons... for not thinking of God as ‘a person’ like other persons, even if we revise the understanding of timelessness to take account of God’s temporal relationship to the created order... He is not ‘a person’ without qualification. The idea of God as ‘a person’ remains genuinely problematic»¹⁵². If this is true –and I think it is– then, the most appropriate move is to abandon these efforts and to view the concept of person reconsidering the classical perspective. Doing this may shed light on Plantinga’s objection.

What we need is a concept of *person* that safeguards both the radical distinction and the close similarity between God and human beings for two obvious reasons. First, it is inconceivable that to say «God is a person» means univocally the same as saying «Socrates is a person». Second, our concept of human personhood, being immediate and empirical, is the springboard of our notion of divine personhood¹⁵³. Thus, the concept must be applicable, at least *analogically*, to both.

However, in a notion of personhood that places more emphasis on *doing* rather than on *being* and identifies *personhood* with its operations (thinking, willing, feeling, etc.), we can hardly comply with this criterion; unless it is maintained that divine operations are radically distinct from human actions. In the latter case, we would be obliged to espouse a radical distinction in *being*, on the ground that action follows being. Besides, personal actions are mere manifestations of personhood. Thinking, loving, willing, speaking, etc., may be very personal but they are not identical with being a person¹⁵⁴. Hence, the

¹⁵² RUDMAN, S., *Concepts of Person...*, p. 158.

¹⁵³ Although I agree with Weigel in saying that human personhood does not have to be the *definitive model* of persons, much less, of divine personhood.

¹⁵⁴ I may be thinking but I am not *my act* of thinking. I may know all my actions but *I* (my being a person) am not and cannot be identical either with my *knowing* them or with them. Juan Fernando Sellés argues in the same vein when he writes: «Nosotros podemos conocer todo aquello que está en nuestras manos... y todo aquello que forma parte de nuestras manifestaciones, a saber, actos, hábitos y virtudes, potencias, las ideas, los quereres, etc. Somos noso-

only option left for us is to abandon the contemporary perspective and embrace the notion of personhood in terms of act of being.

The concept of person that Aquinas applies to God, I submit, complies with our requirement for it neither applies equivocally nor univocally to God and human beings¹⁵⁵. For the Angelic Doctor, «‘person’ signifies what is most perfect in all nature – that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature. Hence, since everything that is perfect must be attributed to God, inasmuch as His essence contains every perfection, this name ‘person’ is fittingly applied to God; not, however, as it is applied to creatures, but in a more excellent way»¹⁵⁶. As Weigel notes, «The overall context suggests Aquinas regards the term as mainly honorific, in the way God is thought of as a king on account of his rule over creation»¹⁵⁷. Hence, if God is called a person, it is because His essence contains every perfection and because «the dignity of the divine nature excels every dignity»¹⁵⁸.

But when we say «God is a person», does «person» signify God’s essence? Aquinas distinguishes, in this respect, «person» as applied to human beings and to God. Applied to the former, the term signifies the essence, as individual substance of the rational nature. However, when attributed to God, a difficulty arises because it runs in contrast to the predication of God as Three Divine Persons. Thus, Aquinas argues,

Now distinction in God is only by relation of origin... while relation in God... is the divine essence itself; and so it is subsistent, for the divine essence subsists. Therefore, as the Godhead is God so the divine paternity is God the Father, Who is a divine person. Therefore a divine person signifies a relation as subsisting. And this is to signify relation by way of substance,

tros mismos, cada quien, el que conoce esto porque es suyo. Pero el quien del que conoce no aparece ante la mirada del que conoce al conocer esas realidades» (SELLÉS, J. F., *La persona humana*: Parte III, *núcleo personal y manifestaciones*, Universidad de la Sabana, Colombia, 1998, p. 22).

¹⁵⁵ «The different sense of the less common term does not produce equivocation in the more common... So it does not follow that, although relation is contained in the signification of divine person, but not in that of an angelic or of a human person, the word ‘person’ is used in an equivocal sense. Though neither is it applied univocally, since nothing can be said univocally of God and creatures» (*S. TH.* I, q. 29, a. 4, ad. 4).

¹⁵⁶ *S. TH.* I, q. 29, a. 3.

¹⁵⁷ WEIGEL, P., «Divine Simplicity», p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ *S. TH.* I, q. 29, a. 4, *ad 2.*

and such a relation is a hypostasis subsisting in the divine nature, although in truth that which subsists in the divine nature is the divine nature itself. Thus it is true to say that the name «person» signifies relation directly, and the essence indirectly¹⁵⁹.

I think this distinction between *person-as-essence* and *person-as-relation* is crucial in understanding the theistic claim that God is a person. Although Aquinas also concedes that «person» as applied to God signifies essence directly and relation indirectly, but only «inasmuch as the essence is the same as the hypostasis: while in God the hypostasis is expressed as distinct by the relation: and thus relation, as such, enters into the notion of the person indirectly»¹⁶⁰, still, that God is a person should not be construed without qualifications, much less, in a univocal sense.

Moreover, a further elucidation on the notion of human personhood is in place in order to see how we should be wary in predicating it to God, particularly in using it as a premise for any claim about divine nature. In his book, *Antropología Trascendental*, Leonardo Polo distinguishes *personal* from Aquinas' *metaphysical act of being*¹⁶¹. The former, he says, is irreducible to the latter because while the metaphysical act of being is characterized by *existence*, the personal act of being does not merely *exists*, but *co-exists*. Polo defines human person, then, as *co-existence*, *co-being*. He says,

De entrada, admitiendo que ser y existir son expresiones equivalentes en metafísica, la antropología trascendental es la doctrina acerca del co-ser humano o bien de la co-existencia. El hombre no se limita a ser, sino que co-es. Co-ser designa la persona, es decir, la realidad abierta en intimidad y también hacia fuera; por tanto, co-ser alude a ser-con. El ser que estudia la metafísica equivale a existir (por lo tanto, a persistir). La antropología no se reduce a la metafísica porque el ser humano es más que existir o ser, en tanto que co-ser o co-existir; y, por tanto, ser-con (desde luego, con el ser de la

¹⁵⁹ *S. TH.* I, q. 29, a. 4.

¹⁶⁰ *S. TH.* I, q. 29, a. 4.

¹⁶¹ In citing Polo's view, I wish to assume two things: first, that understanding personhood in terms of act of being, as Polo does, is more enlightening to the claim «God is a person»; second, taking Polo's definition of the human person as *co-existence* is more promising than the contemporary view in providing solution to the problem of predicating the concept of «person» to God.

metafísica). La historia de la metafísica tradicional es el desarrollo de la consideración del ser en sentido principal. En tanto que conviene añadir el tema del ser humano como irreductible al ser metafísico, habrá que entenderlo, insisto, como co-ser¹⁶².

Therefore, that «God is a person» may mean either that God *is* His Act of Being, the latter being the Perfection of all God's perfections, or that God *is* Subsistent Relation. In this sense, Plantinga is right that God cannot be a property, if by this term, we refer to the perfections that God *has*. For the simplicity doctrine does not claim that God *has* perfections, rather, that God *is* His perfections. If Aquinas is right in claiming that *personhood* entails perfection, then, God is rightly called a person. But this cannot be used as a premise against the divine simplicity.

At this juncture, we have seen that the contemporary debate on divine simplicity revolves around an interpretative account of the doctrine that either misinterprets its original notion in favor of some concept of property (property-interpretation) or neglects the original notion of existence and person by which the doctrine is understood in its classic formulation. Wolterstorff's diagnosis is quite enlightening as it unravels the roots of the contemporary bafflement over the doctrine.

3. WOLTERSTORFF AND DIVINE SIMPLICITY

What caught Wolterstorff's attention with the coherence question on divine simplicity is the fact that a medieval thinker would find the theistic identity claims ontologically non-problematic, whereas so many contemporary thinkers consider them inscrutable and incoherent¹⁶³. He surmises that this may be due to a clash between two fundamentally different ontological styles, which he calls *constituent* and *relation ontology*.

¹⁶² POLO, L., *Antropología trascendental: la persona humana*, Tomo I, 2ª ed., EUNSA, Pamplona, 2003, p.29. It is the person who thinks (the «I» that is thought of does not). The being that is expressed in proposition is only the being that is thought of. That is why, thinking is act, a radical act, which allows that person is co-being: an intimacy capable of assimilating every being that exists.

¹⁶³ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 94.

3.1. *Constituent vs. Relation Ontology*

When Aristotle affirms that we can make the substance of sensible particulars either something that exists apart from the sensible objects or something that is immanent in them, he is giving a hint –perhaps, unconsciously– for a distinction between two ontological approaches. Michael Loux suggests that «the context for the distinction is a certain philosophical project... that of explaining why familiar particulars have the character they do, why, that is, they fall under the kinds and exhibit the properties we, in our prephilosophical thinking, associate with them»¹⁶⁴. What is basically assumed is that either these particulars exhibit the character they have derivatively or dependently, that is, in virtue of another, or they do so by their own right. Both accounts for character derivation give rise to two distinct metaphysical styles.

Wolterstorff calls these styles *constituent* and *relation* ontologies¹⁶⁵. *Constituent* ontology claims that concrete particulars derive the character or properties that they exhibit from entities that constitute or compose them. In contrast, *relation* ontology holds that concrete particulars derive their properties from abstract entities that exist apart from them. Concrete particulars exhibit their properties by virtue of some relation to those abstract entities, either by participation, exemplification or instantiation.

To understand better this distinction, we need to go back to Aristotle's notion of the relationship between substance and accidents, which, in the terminology of Fernando Inciarte, has something to do with the distinction between «ontology of substance» and «ontology of events»¹⁶⁶. Inciarte makes

¹⁶⁴ LOUX, M., «Aristotle's Constituent Ontology», in ZIMMERMAN, D. (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 207. Loux believes that Aristotle and Wolterstorff refer to the same contrast between these two ontological styles although using different languages.

¹⁶⁵ Loux characterizes the difference in mereological terms. On constituent approach, the properties or constituents of sensible things «are something like ingredients or parts of those things» while on relational approach, «they exist apart from the sensible and it is in virtue of standing in some non-mereological relation to those items that familiar particulars have the character they do» (LOUX, M., «Aristotle's Constituent Ontology», p. 208). I think the distinction could be grasped better with Aristotle's distinction between substance and accidents as we shall later see.

¹⁶⁶ «Se trata de dos tipos de ontología que por lo general se consideran como contrapuestos entre sí... Porque existe algún tipo de contraposición entre la ontología de la sustancia y la llamada ontología del evento parece incontrovertible. Para darse cuenta de ello basta con considerar que ya en Aristóteles... se da una clara distinción entre sustancia y evento desde el momento en que

clear that, for Aristotle, «To be a subject of properties cannot be the main meaning of substance or οὐσία. Each material substance must have, for reasons still to be shown, some essential properties or an essence with which to identify itself»¹⁶⁷. Aristotle, he says, shows how the essence of each substance cannot contain any matter at all, whether sensible or intelligible. Thus, «the first substance, i. e. the first meaning of the οὐσία of material things, cannot be a mere subject of properties, because this would in the end be pure matter and that means something undetermined, a bare particular, as it is called nowadays. But first substance cannot be a specific essence either, like man or horse or oak, for such an essence still includes matter...Instead, the first substance must be the pure form as first actuality, e.g., the soul of Socrates»¹⁶⁸.

In this manner, Inciarte explains how Aristotle arrives at identifying substance with its essence, taken here as individual form¹⁶⁹. Thus, «First substance, πρώτη οὐσία, means here pure form in the sense of actuality as opposed to potentiality»¹⁷⁰. Accidents, on the other hand, «are nothing more than the changing states in which a substance may exist»¹⁷¹. Inciarte confers on Kant the merit of having recovered this aspect of Aristotle's substance-accidents distinction, which has been gradually lost in time¹⁷². In Kant's construal of Aristotle, says Inciarte, accidents are not something that is related with substance, but like substance itself in one of its multiple and changing states¹⁷³. But Inciarte is quick to note that while in Kant, substance is mere *phainomenon*

la primera está estrechamente relacionada con el concepto de acto y la segunda con el concepto de proceso o movimiento...» (INCIARTE, F., *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje: ensayos de metafísica*, FLAMARIQUE, L. (ed.), EUNSA, Pamplona, 2004, p. 70).

¹⁶⁷ INCIARTE, F., *First Principles, Substance and Action: Studies in Aristotle and Aristotelianism*, FLAMARIQUE, L. (ed.), Georg Olms, Verlag Hildesheim, 2005, p. 23.

¹⁶⁸ INCIARTE, F., *First Principles...*, p. 23. Inciarte points this out as Aquinas' point of departure from the Philosopher.

¹⁶⁹ For discussion on this question, see INCIARTE, F., *First Principles...*, pp. 199-204.

¹⁷⁰ INCIARTE, F., *First Principles...*, p. 23. «The individual form alone is first substance... this is a thesis I myself am strongly inclined to accept» (p. 193).

¹⁷¹ INCIARTE, F., *First Principles...*, p. 188.

¹⁷² «La tesis que quisiera defender en mi ponencia es que... Kant recuperó un aspecto de la relación entre sustancia y accidentes en la Metafísica de Aristóteles que se había ido perdiendo progresivamente en el lapso de tiempo entre los dos, Aristóteles y Kant» (INCIARTE, F., *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje...*, p. 69).

¹⁷³ Inciarte paraphrases Kant's statement in *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 186/B 230) in these words: «más exacto que considerar a los accidentes como algo que se relacione de algún modo con la sustancia, es considerarlos como la sustancia misma en uno de sus múltiples y cambiantes estados» (INCIARTE, F., *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje...*, p. 71).

(thus, it cannot exhibit an essence or proper form that guarantees its individuality), in Aristotle, substance is identical to its essence or individual form¹⁷⁴.

Unlike Duns Scotus, who espouses a formal distinction *a parte re* between substance and accidents, Aristotle holds that such distinction is one of reason only, although *cum fundamento in re*¹⁷⁵. In Aquinas, Inciarte notes that the distinction is more than just mere distinction of reason *cum fundamento in re*¹⁷⁶. Substance and accidents are really distinct from one another but only *conceptually* for «it is only after abstracting *conceptually* from the substance, from which accidents cannot *really* be separated, that it is possible to define accidents in general (i.e. including compounds of substance and accident) as if they have an essence of their own»¹⁷⁷.

Now, since there is nothing in the mind that does not pass through the senses, we come to know the substance or essence through its accidents. But the intellect is not limited to grasping only the accidents; it knows the entire *being* with all its characteristics. Besides, «in the process of knowing the specific individual being, we constantly go back and forth from the substance to the accidents, and vice-versa»¹⁷⁸. But with the empiricism of John Locke, this view has been challenged¹⁷⁹.

For Locke, substance is «nothing but the supposed but unknown support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re substantia*, without something to support them, (and) we call that support *substantia*, which, according to the true import of the word, is in plain English ‘standing under’ or ‘upholding’»¹⁸⁰. He insists that the idea of substance is something that we *infer* –not *perceive*– as a substratum of the simple ideas (secondary qualities) produced in us through sensible perception by primary

¹⁷⁴ Cfr. INCIARTE, F., *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje...*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁷⁵ Inciarte clarifies: «el fundamento in re de la distinción... es el hecho de que la sustancia... se mueve... que cambia constante o, tal vez incluso, continuamente de estado... Por lo menos según Kant, esto significa a su vez que la distinción entre sustancia y accidentes se reduce al hecho de que los accidentes no son otra cosa que los diversos estados por los que la sustancia pasa en el curso de su existencia» (INCIARTE, F., *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje...*, p. 72).

¹⁷⁶ For discussion, see INCIARTE, F., *Tiempo, sustancia, lenguaje...*, pp. 78-81.

¹⁷⁷ INCIARTE, F., *First Principles...*, p. 191.

¹⁷⁸ ALVIRA, T., CLAVELL, L. and MELENDO, T., *Metaphysics*, SUPAN, L. (trans.), Sinag-tala Publishers, Inc., Manila, 1991, p. 56.

¹⁷⁹ I thank Prof. Enrique Moros for helping me see how relational ontology could be traced back to Locke's notion of knowing substances.

¹⁸⁰ LOCKE, J., *An Essay...*, II, 23, 2,

qualities (accidents). Particular substances, then, are «nothing but several combinations of simple ideas... It is by such combinations of simple ideas, and nothing else, that we represent particular sorts of substances to ourselves»¹⁸¹. On this Lockean epistemology, essence, then, is nothing but a result of the intellect's capacity to *infer*, to *suppose* or to *relate* one idea with another.

Thus, we have before us a clear analysis of the distinction between constituent and relational ontologies. As Enrique Moros notes, what lies behind it is the difference between the classical and the contemporary notions of essence. Wolterstorff says,

According to the dominant style of 20th century, the essence of an entity is something to which it bears a certain relation – the relation of necessarily exemplifying it... The pattern is clear: twentieth-century ontology is relentlessly relational in its style. We don't think of entities as being composites of constituents but as standing in multiple relationships with other entities. And naturally God stands in relationships too. A medieval looking at our ontology would find acknowledgment of essence just missing. We talk about the properties of things; and some of those properties we call the *essence* of the thing. But nowhere do we give ontological acknowledgment to what an entity is *as such*. What we call the essence of an entity would by a medieval be regarded as something whose instance is a non-contingent accident of the entity¹⁸².

In his analysis, Moros perceives a kind of substitution of the classical view and suggests that we avoid the danger of taking these two ontologies as constituting «a perfect parallelism»¹⁸³. While on constituent ontology, essence refers to concrete, natural beings, which exists independently and is anterior to their comprehension or intelligibility, on relational ontology, essence refers fundamentally to the intelligibility or *quiddity* of concrete particulars, which now becomes ontologically anterior to nature. The consequences of such substitution will determine whether philosophy has gained or lost in its quest for the ultimate knowledge of reality. For obviously, on the former, what

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, II, 23, 6.

¹⁸² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», pp. 107-108.

¹⁸³ «Pero conviene, desde ahora mismo, que rechacemos toda ilusión de que entre ambas ontologías se produzca sin más un perfecto paralelismo que permita un sencillo parangón» (MOROS, E., *Modalidad y esencia...*, p. 290).

we know of things (their *quiddity*) corresponds to what they really are (*being*). But on the latter, this is not necessarily so. As Moros rightly observes,

En tal situación los entes no tienen un interno ser que los constituye como tales y marca desde la intimidad su desenvolvimiento. Ya no hay interior, una intimidad propia de las cosas que pueda desvelar nuestro pensamiento. Lo que nuestra capacidad cognoscitiva puede alcanzar son las relaciones que cada uno de los seres mantienen con los demás. Pero ninguna de estas relaciones es un constituyente del ser¹⁸⁴.

In trying to show how the three theistic identity claims are baffling within the relational style but non-problematic with the constituent one, Wolterstorff says his point is not that «working in the style of constituent ontology automatically makes the theistic identity claims non-problematic, but rather that working in the style of relation ontology automatically makes them problematic»¹⁸⁵. This comment alone could already give us a clue that, perhaps, the defect is not on the theistic identity claims, but on the styles. Besides, if the simplicity doctrine is internally coherent, it must not be by virtue of a coherent approach, but the other way around. For it is not our way of looking at things that constitute the way things are.

3.1.1. God is Identical with His Essence

For constituent ontologists, to identify God with His essence or nature would be unproblematic because, for him, «an essence or nature was just as concrete as that of which it is the nature»¹⁸⁶. For a relation ontologist, things do *have* essences.

Naturally the medieval will speak of something as *having* a certain nature. But the having here is to be understood as *having as one of its constituents*. Very much of the difference between medieval and contemporary ontology hangs on these two different construals of «having». Whereas for the medievals,

¹⁸⁴ MOROS, E., *Modalidad y esencia...*, p. 289.

¹⁸⁵ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 107.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101. He emphasizes that for a medieval, the nature of a thing is *what-it-is-as-such*. «An entity does not *have* a certain nature... It *is* a certain nature» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 101).

having an essence was having an essence as one of its constituents, for us, having an *essence* is having an essence as one of its properties: exemplifying it¹⁸⁷.

As Wolterstorff puts it, for medieval thinkers like Aquinas, corporeal beings are composed of nature or essence and individuating matter – which medievals see as two really existing constituents of concrete individuals. An incorporeal God, then, could easily be identified with His nature since He lacks individuating matter¹⁸⁸. I agree with Rogers in holding that Wolterstorff's analysis is questionable. Wolterstorff, Rogers claims, is mistaken on three points.

First, to speak of *a* medieval view on the ontological status of natures or essences seems erroneous for it was one of the most debated issues in the middle ages. Second, the 20th-century view of things as *having* essences and of essences as properties was something that Abelard already advanced in the 12th century as a modern view. Lastly, contrary to Wolterstorff's claim, Aquinas, good Aristotelian that he is, does not hold natures as concrete things like particulars. Rogers adds,

True, according to Aquinas, in the case of incorporeal individuals the individual is identified with its form, but this does not explain divine simplicity. The angels are incorporeal. For them there is no individuating matter, and so each angel is a species unto itself. But the angels are not simple the way God is... their essence is not identical with their existence. Only God, the absolutely necessary being, is perfectly simple. Thus Wolterstorff's analysis does not seem to capture Aquinas' position on divine simplicity¹⁸⁹.

Curiously enough, Wolterstorff alleges to have found in Aquinas' exposition on God's identity with His essence or nature, some elements that Mann affirms in his theory of property instances¹⁹⁰. He claims:

It is Aquinas' view that humanity, i.e., human nature, has as its instances the various particularized human natures to be found in reality – Socrates' nature, Plato's nature, etc. Not human beings, but human natures, are the ins-

¹⁸⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 101. One would immediately notice here Aristotle's distinction between taking the substance of sensible objects as something that exists either «apart from» them (essence that stands in relation to these objects) or «within» them (essence as constitutive of these objects).

¹⁸⁸ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 102-103.

¹⁸⁹ ROGERS, K., «The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 165-166, note no. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Wolterstorff cites Aquinas' *respondeo* of S. TH. I, q. 3, a. 3.

tances of humanity – each human being including in its composite a human nature but always more than that as well. But what, then, about the property of *being a human being*? What does this have as its instances? The instances of this property will be human beings. But obviously human beings are also the entities that exemplify this property. In the case of such ‘individuating’ properties as this, then, exemplification and instance coincide – rather than for those properties that Mann calls «rich»¹⁹¹.

It is not difficult to detect in this interpretation some elements of the relational approach applied to Aquinas’ thought. If my analysis is correct, then Wolterstorff may have fallen into some conceptual anachronism in his construal of Aquinas. Firstly, Wolterstorff contends that Aquinas works with the constituent approach. Hence, why would he (Aquinas) view humanity as something *instantiated* in «various particularized human natures», *instantiation* being a relational concept peculiar to Thomistic ontology? Secondly, Aquinas does not regard essence (of composite entities, like humanity) as a separately existing abstract entity, but something that subsists in a *suppositum* (although it must differ from it)¹⁹². If that is so, how could we assume that he views particularized human natures as *instances* of humanity?¹⁹³ Besides, what is the point of asking about the «property of *being a human being*» and of claiming that it is in this «individuating» property –not in Mann’s «rich» property– that exemplification and instance coincide, if what we have at hand is a Thomistic ontology?

3.1.2. God’s Essence is Identical with His Existence

As to the God’s identity with His existence, Wolterstorff concludes that «The principal problem in this area will be to explain how, for an entity that exists necessarily, there can yet be something that *accounts for* its existence»¹⁹⁴. «Accounting for» is the concept with which Wolterstorff understands Aquinas’

¹⁹¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 104.

¹⁹² Aquinas seems to insist the *necessity* of construing essence or nature as subsisting in a *suppositum*, that even «in things not composed of matter and form, in which individualization is not due to individual matter –that is to say, to ‘this’ matter– the very forms being individualized of themselves – it is necessary the forms themselves should be subsisting ‘*supposita*’» (S. TH. I, q. 3, a. 3).

¹⁹³ In relational ontology, the essence or property must be held as existing apart from what exemplifies or instantiates it so as to stand in relation to it, that is, to make exemplification or instantiation possible.

¹⁹⁴ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 106. (Emphasis is mine.)

nas' notion of how a necessarily existing Being is identical with His essence. Wolterstorff concedes that «if a thing exists contingently, then one cannot *account for* its existence just by referring to its essence; whereas, for example, to *account for* why a horse is an animal, one just points to its nature»¹⁹⁵. In the case of necessarily existing entities, Wolterstorff muses that perhaps for some their existence is distinct from their essence «for it may be that for certain necessarily existing entities, there is something external to them that accounts for why they exist»¹⁹⁶. He does not elaborate.

I submit that Wolterstorff's concept of «accounting for» falls short of Aquinas' concept of causality¹⁹⁷. In citing Aquinas' contention, «that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another»¹⁹⁸, Wolterstorff thinks that «clearly he (Aquinas) intends to affirm the converse as well. It was the uniform conviction of the medievals that *there is nothing other than God's nature that accounts for why God exists*. Hence, God's existence is not distinct from God's essence – as also, for example, Bucephalus' equinity is not distinct from Bucephalus' essence»¹⁹⁹.

However, Wolterstorff misinterprets the claim «there is nothing other than God's nature that accounts for why God exists» to mean that God's existence follows necessarily from His essence. In his construal, it is God's nature which *accounts for* God's existence²⁰⁰. But, Davies notes, Aquinas emphasizes that «God is neither made to be by anything nor able to be made by anything. And... this is not to hold that the fact of God's existence is deducible from His nature»²⁰¹. If the latter thesis were true, then, we could know what the term «God» really signifies. 'God' would be definable and existence would be part

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105. (Emphasis is mine.)

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁹⁷ Wolterstorff seems to manifest his doubts as he confesses that «articulating the concept of account/explanation/cause that is operative here is a challenging intellectual task» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 105).

¹⁹⁸ *S. Th.* I, q. 3, a. 4.

¹⁹⁹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 105. (Emphasis is mine). That it was a uniform conviction among medievals is again debatable.

²⁰⁰ David Burrell also notes the same misinterpretation by Robert Adams in ADAMS, R., «Divine Necessity» in *The Virtue of Faith* (cf. BURRELL, D., «Simpleness», in DAVIES, B., OP (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject*, Cassell, London, 1998, p. 74).

²⁰¹ DAVIES, B., OP, «Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 64. Davies notes that the thesis that God's existence is deducible from His essence is a positive one while Aquinas' claim is negative.

of God's definition²⁰². Herbert McCabe expresses Aquinas' position saying «When we speak of God, although we know how to use our words, there is an important sense in which we do not know what they mean. Fundamentally this is because of our special ignorance of God. We know how to talk about shoes and ships because of our understanding of shoes and ships. We know how to talk about God, not because of any understanding of God, but because of what we know about creatures»²⁰³.

Another reason for the improbability of Wolterstorff's construal to be held by Aquinas and the medievals is that it logically leads to the absurd concept of God as *causa sui*, which Aquinas rejects. For God's essence to account for His existence is utterly contradictory²⁰⁴. The principal difficulty of a relational ontologist in accepting the second theistic identity claim resides in the concept of existence as an abstract property that exists separately. Wolterstorff notes, «Isn't God existence an accident, or an accident-like entity? If so, how can it possibly be identical with God's nature?»²⁰⁵ But predicating existence to God is still an open-ended question.

3.1.3. God is Identical with His Properties

After demonstrating the distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic properties (9's *being an odd number* and *having been mentioned by me*, respectively), Wolterstorff claims that with regards to these properties, «there is also nothing especially problematic in the third identity claim, that none of God's properties is distinct from God's nature»²⁰⁶, for within the constituent approach, intrinsic properties are the only ones conceded as real.

However, two important affirmations deserve some attention. Curiously enough, Wolterstorff holds that after distinguishing the two ontological styles, «the twentieth-century ontologist actually has no difficulty at all with

²⁰² But Aquinas denies that God can be defined because He does not belong to any genus or species (cfr. *S. TH.* I, 3, 5).

²⁰³ MCCABE, H. «Signifying Imperfectly», in MCCABE, H., OP (trans.), *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars Edition, vol. 3, Appendix 3, London and New York, 1964, p. 104 cited by DAVIES, B., OP, «Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity», p. 64.

²⁰⁴ If God is *causa sui*, then, He must *not be* (in order to be caused) and must *be* (in order to cause) at the same time, which is total absurdity.

²⁰⁵ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 104.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

the doctrine of divine simplicity»²⁰⁷ for it «fits even more smoothly into the contemporary style of ontology than into the medieval. In the medieval style, simplicity is a limiting case – albeit, an intelligible one. In the contemporary style, simplicity is the general case»²⁰⁸.

In the relation ontology, simplicity is the general case because it views entities as devoid of any ontological structures or compositions. Yet, if this is right, then, why would Wolterstorff deny that God is absolutely simple? Isn't it paradoxical to think that an ontological style (relation) which views reality to be simple and unstructured would deny that God, the Ultimate Cause of reality, cannot be simple? Isn't it equally paradoxical to think that an ontological style (constituent) which views reality as constituted would have to deny constitution in order to uphold absolute divine simplicity? Is the coherence of divine simplicity just a question of ontological style? I have my doubts.

Another interesting claim concerns what Wolterstorff thinks as the *locus* of engagement with the simplicity doctrine. He may have questioned the doctrine's internal coherence but he does not consider it as the place to engage the medieval thinkers with. The question on whether or not God *has* a nature, he says, is a matter of «fundamental conflict of intuitions»²⁰⁹. Wolterstorff argues that what *really* perplexed the medieval thinkers were two-fold: (a) the coherence of simplicity doctrine with other Christian fundamental doctrines, and (b) the possibility of a theory that allows multiple predications about God²¹⁰. He says,

I suggest that if we grant them their ontological style, the *constituent* style, then the place to engage them is not on the theistic identity claims as such. Those prove to be non-problematic. The place to engage them, in the first place, is on the tenability in general of constituent ontology. The place to engage them, in the second place, is on the general question of whether it is possible, while holding that God is simple, to develop a theory of predication that adequately accounts for the multiplicity of distinct things Christians wish to say about God. And the place to engage them, thirdly, is in their attempt to show that the doctrine of simplicity does not contradict other fundamental doctrines²¹¹.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²¹⁰ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 109.

²¹¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 110.

Later, we shall have a word on the general tenability of Wolterstorff's analysis. With regards to the possibility of a theory of predication according to his specifications, the question shall be dealt with in the succeeding chapter. For the meantime, we shall take up the question on whether the simplicity doctrine contradicts or not other fundamental Christian doctrines like God's knowledge, free will and redemption.

3.2. *Divine Simplicity, Immutability and Impassibility*

Wolterstorff laments over the vagueness with which Aquinas presents how the simplicity doctrine is coherent with the biblical doctrines²¹², in particular, with claims on God's knowledge, love, creative act, revealing and redeeming²¹³. But I believe proper understanding of Thomistic views would reveal that the contrary is true.

3.2.1. Whether God Knows Suffering and Evil in the World

In his article *Suffering Love*²¹⁴, Wolterstorff engages with the Thomistic tenet which holds that by their very nature, sorrow and pain cannot be found in God²¹⁵. He argues that if God cannot suffer, then, He is either ignorant of or indifferent to the suffering and evil that transpire in the life of human creatures. But this is incompatible with the biblical doctrines on God's omniscience and love. The Bible presents God as «disturbed by the sufferings we human beings undergo and the wrongs we wreak upon each other – and by the way we treat God»²¹⁶.

²¹² «Aquinas struggled to show that the doctrine of divine simplicity is not in contradiction with other doctrines that he felt required to affirm» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 93).

²¹³ «We shall want to ask whether what they (the medievals) identify as knowledge, love, creation, revelation, redemption, etc., in the simple self-sufficient God, can be viewed as what the theist is speaking of when she says that God knows and loves, that God has created, that God reveals to human beings God's will, and that God is working for the redemption of the cosmos. I have my doubts» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Divine Simplicity», p. 111).

²¹⁴ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», in *Inquiring About God*, pp. 182-222.

²¹⁵ Cfr. *SCG*, I, 89, 9. «In every passion of the appetite the patient is somehow drawn out of his usual, calm, or connatural disposition... But it is not possible for God to be somehow drawn outside His natural condition, since He is absolutely immutable» (*SCG*, I, 89, 4).

²¹⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed by what transpires in human affairs», in WOLTERSTORFF, N., *Inquiring About God*, p. 223.

In his analysis of Aquinas' theory on divine knowledge, will and love, Wolterstorff concludes that «Aquinas does not find, in the Plotinian God, anything that could appropriately be called *knowing the suffering and evil that transpire in our world*»²¹⁷. On Aquinas' theory, since the primary and essential object of divine knowledge, will and love is the divine self, what God knows, wills and loves, is no other than God's Essence. Wolterstorff notes: «God knows Godself, and God is the cause of all things other than Godself: this pair of phenomena is what Aquinas calls 'God's knowing of things other than Godself', on the principle that to know the cause of a thing is to know the thing. And consider: God wills God's perfection, and the ensemble of things other than God enhances God's perfection by resembling God: this pair of phenomena Aquinas calls *God's willing of things other than Godself*. He furthermore proposes calling this last pair of phenomena, *God's loving of things other than Godself*, on the grounds that one only wills what one regards as good, and that to love something is to will its good»²¹⁸. Then, he concludes, God does not have an awareness of the world at all. If this is true, then God does not *sufferingly* know the world.

What induces Wolterstorff to draw so hastily such a conclusion is something vague, for Aquinas' claim is quite clear: «God knows Himself as primarily and essentially known, whereas He knows other things as seen in His essence»²¹⁹. Besides, Wolterstorff is well aware of Aquinas' arguments on God's having proper knowledge of all things in their distinction from each other²²⁰. But to conclude from this that God knows *only* His Godself is quite precipitated²²¹.

Wolterstorff argues further that if, in knowing God's essence, God knows the multiple ways other things that resemble it, then, by virtue of the simplicity doctrine, the object of God's knowledge must be single and identical with His essence. «The demands of the simplicity doctrine are such that he (Aquinas) must say that God's knowing of God's essence just *is* God's knowing of the

²¹⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 215.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

²¹⁹ *ScG*, I, 49, 5.

²²⁰ Cfr. *ScG*, I, 50, 1-11.

²²¹ Wolterstorff, in fact, says, «What is missing throughout is any awareness of, any acquaintance with things other than Godself by God. God has no concept nor anything like a concept of anything other than Godself» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 210).

various ways in which God can be resembled... But if that is indeed true, then what must be said is that the doctrine of divine simplicity requires not only that God's *knowing* is single but also that *what God knows* is single»²²². Ultimately, God knows nothing more than His own Godself. «The conclusion must be that Aquinas' adherence to the simplicity doctrine makes untenable this attempt at explaining how God knows things other than Godself»²²³.

However, Wolterstorff's interpretation seems too simplistic. Aquinas' point of departure is the existence of and the real distinction between God and things other than God²²⁴. Explaining how God knows both in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas makes this point clear: «we say that God sees Himself in Himself, because He sees Himself through His essence; and He sees other things not in themselves, but in Himself; inasmuch as His essence contains the similitude of things other than Himself»²²⁵. Aquinas argues that «God knows things not by receiving anything from them, but, rather, by exercising His causality on them»²²⁶. Considering both assumptions, on what ground can it be concluded that a single divine act of knowing identical with God's essence *must* entail a single object of knowledge also identical with divine essence, or that since God's *act of knowing* is single, *what God knows* must also be single? For in as much as one single cause can have many effects, so is God's one act of knowing can have multiple objects. And to say that these objects are known through God's essence is not contradictory.

Wolterstorff argues that «Aquinas' struggle to find in the Plotinian God something that might appropriately be called 'knowledge of other things' becomes even more transparently a struggle when it comes to God's knowledge of evil»²²⁷. For Aquinas, «when the good is known, the opposite evil is known. But God knows all particular goods, to which evils are oppo-

²²² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 214. However, it must be noted that, strictly speaking, God *has* no ideas, since *to have ideas*, being a creatural mode of knowing, is improper of God: it is a defective and insufficient form of knowing. Thus, in talking about ideas in God, or objects of God's knowledge, we must consider them, not in their respective distinctions, but in being God's Essence Itself.

²²³ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 214.

²²⁴ Aquinas cites Dionysius saying «the divine wisdom, knowing itself, knows other things», and Psalm 110: 20: «He hath looked forth from His high sanctuary», which, for Aquinas, means «that God sees other things from His own height» (cfr. *ScG*, I, 49, 6, 7).

²²⁵ *S. TH.* I, q. 14, a. 5.

²²⁶ *ScG*, I, 70, 2.

²²⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 214.

sed. Therefore God knows evils»²²⁸. Wolterstorff interprets this to mean that God, in knowing a particular good, say a person of good sight, also knows what blindness is. But what is baffling is Wolterstorff's ruling: «anyone who has such knowledge... That leaves such a person well short of knowing, say, that some particular elderly woman has gone blind – which is what all of us would regard as knowing one of the actual evils of our world»²²⁹. Meaning to say, to know abstract evil (blindness) *only* as something opposite to concrete, particular good (a person of good sight) cannot be appropriately called «knowledge of evil». But what makes Wolterstorff think that, for Aquinas, God's knowledge of evil is limited only to abstract evil and that God does not know some particular blind woman? What is true, I submit, is that in saying, «when the good is known, the opposite evil is known», Aquinas is thinking of evil not as a subsisting entity in itself, but something that is corollary to the concept of good. In Aquinas' account, an absolutely simple God knows suffering and evil in the world but the evil of sorrow and pain is not present in God.

3.2.2. Whether God's Love is a Suffering Love

Wolterstorff argues that adopting the Plotinian concept of an impassible God pays the price of surrendering the Christian belief in a knowing and loving biblical God and to do this «is to move away from Christianity toward some other form of religion»²³⁰. He alleges that the divine simplicity tradition presents a God who loves the world, «only in the mode of benevolence; it proposed construing all the biblical passages in the light of that conviction»²³¹. He rejects the idea of a benevolent, Stoic divine love and insinuates that true love of God consists in the modern notion of love in the mode of sympathy. He says, «The moderns paint in attractive colors a moral ideal that is an alternative to that of the tradition, and point to various biblical passages speaking

²²⁸ *S. TH.* I, q. 71, a. 2.

²²⁹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 215.

²³⁰ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 215. Whether or not Wolterstorff identifies the Plotinian concept of God with Aquinas' simple God is not quite clear. But he takes the former as a great influence to the latter.

²³¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 215. It must be noted that Wolterstorff understands «benevolence» as a «steady disposition to do good to God's creatures» (p. 216) and takes it as something opposed to love as sympathy.

of God's suffering love – passages that the tradition, for centuries, has construed in its own way»²³².

To love with sympathy is to delight in the joy and to pain over the suffering of the beloved. But the Plotinian God delights only in His own well-doing and is not perturbed by the evil in his creation. «For no matter what the state of the world, there is room for God's successful exercise of God's steady disposition to do good; and it is in *that* exercise that God finds delight»²³³. Or else, God's state of joy or sadness would be conditioned by things other than Godself. This God acts out of duty and values nothing but His own good will²³⁴.

But aside from the conflict with the Scriptural tradition that this picture provokes²³⁵, Wolterstorff notes that «To construe God's love as purely benevolence and to construe God's benevolence along Kantian-Stoic lines as God's acting out of duty, is to be left without God's love»²³⁶. He, then, suggests that we reject this duty-model of God's love and embrace another model in which positive and negative valuing exists. «To act out of love toward something other than oneself is to value that thing and certain states of that thing»²³⁷.

Wolterstorff's argument echoes a famous objection against divine impassibility: «how can God be Love and not pained (as human love at its best is pained) by evil?»²³⁸ How can we conceive of divine love without sympathy? Besides, if God fully became man, how can we say that He did not experience any pain that His manhood entails?²³⁹

Analyzing Wolterstorff's argument requires a careful distinction between love and sympathy and a thorough understanding of what it means to sorrow

²³² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 216.

²³³ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 216.

²³⁴ Wolterstorff notes, «If we interpret God's benevolence as God's acting out of duty, then the traditional picture becomes coherent» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 218).

²³⁵ Wolterstorff notes that «The picture of God as a Stoic sage, ever blissful and non-suffering, is in deep conflict with the biblical picture» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 219).

²³⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Suffering Love», p. 218.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²³⁸ OWEN, H. P., *Concepts of Deity*, MacMillan, London, 1971, p. 24.

²³⁹ Although this last objection based on Incarnation is not fully developed in Wolterstorff, his position is clear: in Jesus, God suffers. It must be clarified, however, that by virtue of *communicatio idiomatum*, to affirm that God suffers is valid inasmuch as it holds that it is the Second Divine Person Who is Incarnated, and that divine and human natures are essentially united –with distinction but without separation– in the One Divine Person of Christ. But if it suggests that the divinity suffers, then the affirmation is invalid.

over evil. It must be noted that love cannot be reduced to mere sympathy, understood in this context as to delight over the good or to pain over the evil of the beloved. Sympathy, in this sense, is an affection that is founded on love. As Aquinas says, «the principle of every affection is love. For joy and desire are only of a good that is loved, and fear and sadness are only of an evil that is opposed to the good that is loved; and from all these all the other affections take their origin. But in God there is joy and delight»²⁴⁰. Hence, contra Wolterstorff, we must say that God's love takes also the mode of sympathy, although it is not irreducible to it.

Wolterstorff admits that God takes joy (sympathizes) in His creatures, but limits such delight only in the exercise of God's benevolence or firm disposition to do good²⁴¹. What Wolterstorff somehow missed in the picture is that, in Aquinas, God's benevolence is *creative* because divine will is creative²⁴². The good that God wills, He *creates*.

God loves all existing things. For all existing things, in so far as they exist, are good, since the existence of a thing is itself a good... God's will is the cause of all things. It must need be, therefore, that a thing has existence, or any kind of good, only inasmuch as it is willed by God. To every existing thing, then, God wills some good. Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists²⁴³.

On this perspective, Wolterstorff's picture of a Stoic, *benevolently* loving God is modified. He is not a Stoic God Who delights solely on a dutiful exercise of His benevolent love without valuing the condition of His creatures. Rather, He is a God, Who, in His benevolent love, causes the existence of His creatures. And because God cares for the plight of His creatures, He wills (creates) their good and delights in it, while He sorrows for their evil and dispels it.

In the same vein, Aquinas explains God's mercy. «Mercy is especially to be attributed to God, as seen in its effect, but not as an affection of passion.

²⁴⁰ *SCG*, I, 91, 7.

²⁴¹ Aquinas defines benevolent love as «to will the good of the beloved» (*SCG*, I, 91, 2).

²⁴² *S. TH.* I, q. 19, a. 4.

²⁴³ *S. TH.* I, q. 20, a. 2. He also says, «Certain philosophers likewise made God's love to be the principle of things. With this view the words of Dionysius agree when he says that «the divine love did not allow Him to be without offspring» (*SCG*, I, 91, 14).

In proof of which it must be considered that a person is said to be merciful (*misericos*), as being, so to speak, sorrowful at heart (*miserum cor*); being affected with sorrow at the misery of another as though it were his own. Hence it follows that he endeavors to dispel the misery of this other, as if it were his; and this is the effect of mercy. To sorrow, therefore, over the misery of others belongs not to God; but it does most properly belong to Him to dispel that misery, whatever be the defect we call by that name»²⁴⁴. Hence, God's benevolent love, in Aquinas' account, is not a Stoic love.

Wolterstorff's description of benevolent love fits better in what Aquinas calls our human way of loving. When we love, as Wolterstorff says, we *value* or *sympathize* in the condition of the beloved, whether positively or negatively. But our *valuing* or *sympathizing* takes place because the goodness of the object (or the lack of it), says Aquinas, «calls forth our love», and we desire that the good it has be preserved and receive besides the good it has not²⁴⁵. When God loves benevolently, He also *values* the condition of the beloved. But God's *valuing* or *sympathizing* does more, as it *causes* the thing to exist. Hence, God's *valuing* is an act of loving *par excellence* because it is a *creative*.

Does God love in the mode of sympathy, i.e., is it a suffering love? Human «sympathy» (from the Greek *syn-* «together» and *pathos* «feeling»), simply means *affinity of feelings, being affected by like feelings*²⁴⁶. Suffering or sympathetic love, then, means to be affected by the same suffering of the beloved as if it were one's own. But God's *suffering* love needs not be ontologically identical. Divine «sympathy» cannot be limited only in an *affinity of feelings*. Since it is creative, it consists in a *participation of being*, because God, in creating things, shares His Being. When God sympathizes, He lets creatures participate in His own Being.

²⁴⁴ S. TH. I, q. 21, a. 3. In citing this passage, Wolterstorff interprets Aquinas as turning God's mercy into «mere benevolence». What I am arguing is that, in God, mercy and benevolence means the same. Only human mercy must be understood as *miserum cor* because God cannot have passions.

²⁴⁵ «Since our will is not the cause of the goodness of things, but is moved by it as by its object, our love, whereby we will good to anything, is not the cause of its goodness; but conversely its goodness, whether real or imaginary, calls forth our love, by which we will that it should preserve the good it has, and receive besides the good it has not, and to this end we direct our actions: whereas the love of God infuses and creates goodness» (S. TH. I, q. 20, a. 2).

²⁴⁶ ONLINE ETYMOLOGY DICTIONARY, «Sympathy», <[http://www.etymonline.com /index.php?term=sympathy](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sympathy)> [Last consulted: November 4, 2011].

In the same way that when God creates, His creative act does not suppose any change or modification in His Being, when He «sympathizes» or «loves benevolently», God is not affected or altered in His Essence. To be affected is to endure some passion, which takes place «only according to sensitive appetite»²⁴⁷. But no sensitive appetite can be found in God for it is absurd to attribute to Him any sensitive knowledge²⁴⁸. Hence, God loves sufferingly but remains immutable.

However, divine immutability does not imply that God is Stoic. That no passion can be attributed to God in the same sense that it is attributed to creatures simply means that God is Absolutely Perfect. Besides, while to suffer or to sorrow is not in Him *properly speaking*, it is proper to Him to dispel suffering and sorrow. Owen says the sorrow and pain in God are wholly vicarious and that any suffering that God experiences through His love for His creatures «is immediately transfigured by the joy that is necessarily His within his uncreated Godhead»²⁴⁹. Let us now examine what it means for an immutable God to sorrow over evil as an expression of His suffering love.

3.2.3. Whether Evil is Present in a God Who sorrows

In another article, *Is God disturbed by what transpires in human affairs?*²⁵⁰, Wolterstorff argues for some alleged incongruence in Aquinas' position that it is inappropriate for God to sorrow. But his argument that «Aquinas' way of developing the claim that God does not experience anger implies that God cannot be wronged»²⁵¹ is quite hasty. Aquinas distinguishes clearly love, joy and delight as *passions*, or *acts of the sensitive appetite* from love, joy and delight as *acts of the intellectual appetite*²⁵². He attributes only the latter to God for the simple reason that the former denotes some material element; thus, introducing com-

²⁴⁷ ScG, I, 89, 2. Aquinas also cites Aristotle's *Physics*, VII, 3 (246b 20).

²⁴⁸ ScG, I, 44.

²⁴⁹ Owen takes divine suffering as God's «imaginative response to the sin and suffering that afflict his creatures» (OWEN, H. P., *Concepts of Deity*, p. 24).

²⁵⁰ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», pp. 223-238.

²⁵¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 224.

²⁵² «Love, therefore, and joy and delight are passions; in so far as they denote acts of the intellectual appetite, they are not passions. It is in this latter sense that they are in God» (*S. TH.* I, q. 20, a, 1, *ad 1*). For Aquinas, passions are «movements of the sensitive appetite» (*S. TH.* I-II, q. 23, a, 1, *sed contra*). He identifies the intellectual appetite with the will (cfr. *S. TH.* I, q. 82, a, 2, *obj. 3*).

position in the divine essence²⁵³. On the other hand, sorrow, anger and desire, by nature, are passions that not only entail material element or bodily change but also imperfections as to their formal element²⁵⁴. For this reason, they cannot «be properly predicated of God... except metaphorically, and from likeness of effects»²⁵⁵. Besides, absolute divine perfection necessarily entails that sorrow and anger cannot be present in God because sorrow is «caused by a present evil... (which is) repugnant to the movement of the will»²⁵⁶ and «being uneasy about a present evil, is itself an evil, because it hinders the response of the appetite in good»²⁵⁷. But both are unthinkable in an absolutely perfect being²⁵⁸.

However, Aquinas concedes that to sorrow is good inasmuch as it is «on the supposition of something else». He says, «supposing the presence of something saddening or painful, it is a sign of goodness if a man is in sorrow or pain on account of this present evil. For if he were not to be in sorrow or pain, this could only be either because he feels it not, or because he does not reckon it as something unbecoming, both of which are manifest evils. Consequently it is a condition of goodness, that, supposing an evil to be present, sorrow or pain should ensue»²⁵⁹.

Now, Aquinas claims that God knows evil and that it is impossible for Him not to reckon it as evil, as it would manifest a defect in God. Wolterstorff asks, «So how can Aquinas hold that there is nothing over which it is appropriate for God to sorrow, given his contention that it is an imperfection not to sorrow over the evils present to one?»²⁶⁰. In this question, we may distin-

²⁵³ «In the passions of the sensitive appetite there may be distinguished a certain material element--namely, the bodily change--and a certain formal element, which is on the part of the appetite» (S. TH. I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 2).

²⁵⁴ «Thus in anger, as the Philosopher says (*De Anima* iii, 15, 63, 64), the material element is the kindling of the blood about the heart; but the formal, the appetite for revenge. Again, as regards the formal element of certain passions a certain imperfection is implied, as in desire, which is of the good we have not, and in sorrow, which is about the evil we have. This applies also to anger, which supposes sorrow» (S. TH. I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 2).

²⁵⁵ S. TH. I, q. 20, a. 1, resp. 2; «Anger and the like are attributed to God on account of a similitude of effect. Thus, because to punish is properly the act of an angry man, God's punishment is metaphorically spoken of as His anger» (S. TH. I, q. 3, a. 2, ad 2); cfr. also S. TH. I, q. 19, a. 11).

²⁵⁶ S. TH. I-II, q. 37, a. 2, ad.

²⁵⁷ S. TH. I-II, q. 39, a. 1, ad.

²⁵⁸ Juan Miguel Garrigues notes that «Si Dios no concibe el mal, no es que haya algo que escape a su visión» (GARRIGUES, J. M., *Dios sin idea del mal*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2000, p. 189).

²⁵⁹ S. TH. I-II, q. 39, a. 1, ad.

²⁶⁰ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 229.

guish «to sorrow over evil» from the «presence of sorrow» (which, in itself, is evil) in God. Wolterstorff holds that since God sorrows over evil, sorrow is present in God. Now, the *incapacity* to sorrow over evil entails the presence of evil itself for it denotes a defect. But if this is true, why would the *capacity* to sorrow over evil also *necessarily* entail the presence of evil? Two points require elucidation to clarify this question.

First, I think it is crucial here Aquinas' distinction between two ways by which a thing may be good or evil, i.e., considered «simply and in itself» and considered «on the supposition of something else»²⁶¹. On such distinction, sorrow in itself implies an imperfection and the presence of evil that is repugnant to the will; hence, it cannot be found in God as it would entail contradiction in His Essence. But sorrow on account of something else can be a sign of excellence; therefore, it is attributable to God. Wolterstorff's claim that God is disturbed by what transpires in human affairs, I think, goes along this vein.

The distinction allows us to see how God, without being affected by sorrow (in the sense of sorrow being present *in* God), could still *sorrow over* human suffering and evil. Naturally, in human beings, it is not difficult to identify these two senses of sorrow. We are affected by sorrow, for unlike in God, the presence of evil that is repugnant to our good will, hinders us from enjoying the good we desire. And this implies imperfection; hence, evil is present in man. Like God, we sorrow over suffering and evil around us. And this is also virtuous. But unlike God, we are affected by them. That is why, for us, to sorrow over evil means that sorrow (which, in itself, is evil) is present in us. But on what ground it *has to be exactly* like this with God? Wolterstorff holds that «since God loves human beings, since empathy is an important part of love, since there is suffering among human beings, and since empathy with the suffering is itself a mode of suffering, God must suffer»²⁶². But we can raise the question: why should human and divine empathy be identical? On what ground should God *identically* empathize the way we do? Why should God *sufferingly* love exactly the way we do?

²⁶¹ «A thing may be good or evil in two ways: first considered simply and in itself; and thus all sorrow is an evil, because the mere fact of a man's appetite being uneasy about a present evil, is itself an evil, because it hinders the response of the appetite in good. Secondly, a thing is said to be good or evil, on the supposition of something else: thus shame is said to be good, on the supposition of a shameful deed done, as stated in Ethic. iv, 9» (S. TH. I-II, q. 39, a. 1, *ad*).

²⁶² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 224.

Second, that God sorrows over the presence of evil does not *necessarily* entail that evil is present *in* God. As Aquinas notes, «Evil is known by God not through its own type, but through the type of good. Evil, therefore, has no idea in God, neither in so far as an idea is an ‘exemplar’ nor as a ‘type’»²⁶³. God knows evil, not as something subsisting in itself (substantial) but as the privation of some good²⁶⁴. For this reason, God, in knowing evil, does not and cannot *create* it, in the same way God, in desiring good for His creatures, *creates* that good. Garrigues states it clearly: «Dios no puede concebir el mal, porque todo cuanto Dios concibe, lo crea: el ser, el bien, la vida. Las ‘ideas’ de Dios son la manera en que sus criaturas participan de sus perfecciones. El mal no es, y Dios no puede conocerlo en una idea. Nada en Él corresponde al mal»²⁶⁵. Hence, the presence of evil over which God sorrows, then, is not substantial.

Now, if to sorrow or pain over suffering and evil is, as Aquinas claims, «a sign of goodness»²⁶⁶, and if «to sorrow is a good inasmuch as it denotes perception and rejection of evil»²⁶⁷, and, lastly, if it is proper to God to dispel suffering rather than to be affected by it, then, the more logical conclusion we can draw is that God, the Highest Good, can and does sorrow and pain over suffering and evil and that His sorrow is a good –I would say, an excellent virtue– for not only does He perceive and reckon suffering and evil, but also He eliminates them. If to sorrow over evil is a good, then, God sorrows over evil because He is the Highest Good, but without the evil of sorrow being *substantially* present in Him. On what ground, then, would Wolterstorff conclude that «if there is no sorrow in God, no anger, indignation, and the like, then there is for God no ‘present evil’, nothing to sorrow over»²⁶⁸? As we have seen,

²⁶³ S. TH. I, q. 15, a. 3, *ad* 1.

²⁶⁴ «In this universe even that which is called evil, well ordered, and kept in its place, sets the good in higher relief, so that good things are more pleasing and praiseworthy than evil ones. Nor would Almighty God... in any way allow anything evil to exist among His works were He not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil. For what else is that which is called evil but a removal of good?» (AUGUSTINE, *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity*, RAMSEY, B., OP (ed.), New City Press, New York, 2000, p. 41). This is why, to conceive substantially of evil as an entity, which I suspect is how Wolterstorff presents it, is misleading.

²⁶⁵ GARRIGUES, J. M., *Dios sin idea del mal*, p. 190.

²⁶⁶ S. TH. I-II, q. 39, a. 1, *ad*.

²⁶⁷ Aquinas even argues that «In so far as sorrow is good, it can be a virtuous good» because, in the case of interior sorrow, its perception is a sign of the «right judgment of reason» and its rejection by the will shows the latter good disposition to detest evil (cfr. S. TH. I-II, q. 39, a. 2, *ad*).

²⁶⁸ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 229.

God has something to sorrow over (the evil present in the world). But this is not something that affects God (evil cannot be present in God) for God's sorrowing over it is, in itself, an excellent virtue, not evil in itself²⁶⁹. Wolterstorff seems to confuse evil present in the world (which God sorrows over) with evil present in God (which He cannot sorrow over for it entails a contradiction).

Another argument shows how Wolterstorff identifies *sorrow in* God with God's *sorrowing over* an evil that goes against God's will – in this case, the evil of sin. He says,

Accordingly, if something is out of accord with God's will, then perforce it is out of accord with God's intellectual appetite. And sin... is out of accord with God's will. But given the earlier account of sorrow, if things happen that are out of accord with God's intellectual appetite, then there is sorrow in God. It follows, so it would seem, that there is sorrow in God²⁷⁰.

Wolterstorff argues that since sin, although in itself, is not actively willed by God but is permitted only in view of a greater good, entails opposition to God's will and since sorrow entails the presence of evil which is repugnant to the movement of the will for it hinders it from enjoying what it wishes to enjoy, then, there is sorrow in God. However, employing the Thomistic distinction above, it could be argued that the presence of the evil of sin is repugnant to God's will, not when it is considered *simply* and *in itself*, for no evil can hinder God from enjoying the eternal bliss He is enjoying. It is unthinkable of God *not to be happy* for a moment, and of God's will to wish or to desire to be happy. In contrast, for the sinner, sin is repugnant simply and in itself because it hinders the will from enjoying perfect happiness. It corrupts the will. If «No man willingly does wrong»²⁷¹, as Plato says, then, falling into sin implies corruption in the will. But sin cannot and does not corrupt the divine will. Hence, sin, as a moral evil, is repugnant to God's will, not when it is considered simply and in itself.

²⁶⁹ On the contrary, man's sorrowing over the presence of evil is an evil in itself because to sorrow for human beings, as Aquinas puts it, implies an «imperfection». Hence, when we sorrow over evil, our doing so already implies the presence of evil in us – the evil of sorrow.

²⁷⁰ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 231.

²⁷¹ Norman Gulley examines thoroughly the meaning of Plato's famous words in GULLEY, N., «The Interpretation of 'No One Does Wrong Willingly' in Plato's Dialogues», in *Phronesis*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1965), pp. 82-96.

Sin is repugnant to God's will only *on the supposition* that it is noxious to the sinner. God hates sin only because He loves the sinner. Take away that love, such hatred or repugnance of sin to God's will is devoid of meaning. Hence, if sin is repugnant to God's intellectual appetite on account of the sinner, then, sorrow is not *in* God but God can, and, in fact, does *sorrow over* sin and its noxious effect on the sinner. I think the same conclusion is arrived at even if we employ, as Wolterstorff does, Aquinas' distinction between *antecedent* and *consequent* will, although Wolterstorff says «it is of no help in explaining and defending Aquinas' claim that God does not sorrow over sin – nor, let us note, does Aquinas himself employ it for that purpose»²⁷².

For Aquinas, «God's consequent will is always fulfilled, while what He wills antecedently may not take place»²⁷³. With this, Wolterstorff takes Aquinas to claim that sin is out of accord with God's antecedent will, not with the consequent, «and that only if something were out of accord with God's consequent will would it be appropriate for God to sorrow over it»²⁷⁴. He also holds that such distinction between antecedent and consequent will «is obviously a straightforward counterpart to the distinction... between something's being evil considered as such and something's being evil all things considered»²⁷⁵. Wolterstorff may be right in demonstrating that, in reality, it is Aquinas' view that sin is opposed to both the antecedent and consequent will of God. But it makes no difference now since we have concluded that, indeed, in Aquinas, God *sorrows over* sin, contrary to what Wolterstorff supposes. But this does not entail *sorrow in* God. Besides, let it be noted that when we talk of God's antecedent and consequent will, we do not mean two separate wills in God. We only distinguish them with respect to us, temporal creatures. But with respect to an eternal God, there is only one divine will²⁷⁶.

Based on the preceding considerations, we have established, *contra* Wolterstorff that, in Aquinas' position, (a) God knows the suffering and evil in the world. But such knowledge is not of suffering and evil as *substantially* existing

²⁷² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 232.

²⁷³ *S. Th.* I, q. 19, a. 6, *ad* 1.

²⁷⁴ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 232.

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁷⁶ Probably, Wolterstorff would not be quite happy with this distinction on account of his position on divine eternity, which shall be discussed later.

entities since evil is a corollary concept of the good. As a parasitic concept, evil is the privation of good. God knows all the particular good through His knowledge of His own Essence; (b) God loves His creatures with a benevolent but creative love. He creates the good He desires for His beloved. God's love is suffering in the sense that He dispels the cause of suffering of the beloved. In *sufferingly* loving His creatures, no change takes place in God; (c) God sorrows over the present evil in the world. But this does not necessarily entail that evil is present in God.

Having established these, it is now difficult to see how the divine simplicity doctrine becomes incompatible with the biblical teachings on God's knowledge, love and redemption. Contrary to Wolterstorff's claim, the whole history of man's salvation makes sense more profoundly only under the light of the simplicity doctrine²⁷⁷. God knows the evil which man suffers—the evil of sin— but such knowledge does not necessarily make evil to be present *in* God. God sorrows over sin and its effects on man but without the need of being affected by it. In His *suffering*, benevolent love, «God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son» in order to dispel the cause of our suffering (Jn 3: 16, *RSV*)²⁷⁸. The reasonability of faith requires that, in predicating to God His acts of knowing, loving and redeeming mankind, God remain to be absolutely one and simple. Or else, He would not be God.

Wolterstorff's another attempt to discredit the divine simplicity doctrine centers on the argument that if God is simple, then, He must be eternal. Arguing that the Bible presents God as temporal, he goes on to claim that God is not eternal but everlasting. What follows is an analysis of Wolterstorff's preferred account of temporality and of the defensibility of his arguments.

3.3. *Divine Eternity, Awareness and Action*

In a compilation of essays that tackle the question on God and time, Gregory E. Ganssle enumerates five important issues, each of which is discussed

²⁷⁷ Wolterstorff argues: «Scripture presents God not only as disturbed by evil but also as the savior of humankind from evil; Christianity is a salvation religion. If there were nothing in human affairs that God desired to be otherwise, talk of salvation would make no sense» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Is God disturbed...», p. 236).

²⁷⁸ Biblical citations are from the CATHOLIC BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN, *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1966*.

by each philosopher-contributor²⁷⁹. They are «the nature of time, the creation of the universe, God's knowledge of the future, God's interaction with His people and the fullness of God's life»²⁸⁰. In one way or another, each issue will be touched in what follows.

3.3.1. Bible and the Nature of Time

- On Biblical Orthodoxy

Wolterstorff believes that authentic commitment to biblical orthodoxy is best maintained if we affirm that God is temporal rather than timeless²⁸¹. He says that by presenting God as an active agent in human history, the Bible describes Him to be historical and changing.

God responds to what transpires in human affairs by performing a succession of actions, including actions of speaking... if a person does one thing at one time and a different thing at a later time, then there's change in that person's life. Behind the change in action there is, in turn, a change in knowledge... God has a history, and in this history there are changes in God's actions, responses, and knowledge. The God of Scripture is One of whom a narrative can be told... If something has a history, then perforce that being is in time²⁸².

As a hermeneutic principle, Wolterstorff establishes that if we accept the canonicity of the Sacred Scripture, then, we should «affirm as literally true

²⁷⁹ The book highlights four views on God and time by four distinguished contemporary thinkers –Paul Helm, Alan G. Padgett, William Lane Craig and Nicholas Wolterstorff– who, Ganssle says, «are some of the leading thinkers» of the subject (GANSSE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time: Four Views*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2001, p. 24). In Wolterstorff's essays, he answers some recent objections to his position.

²⁸⁰ For discussion on each issue, see GANSSE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time*, pp. 13-24.

²⁸¹ H. P. Owen explains that the adjective «eternal» has two senses: «timeless» and «everlasting». The latter may be given either a strong form –what is everlasting always has existed and will always exist– or a weak form, that is, it has a beginning but no end (like the soul) (cf. OWEN, H. P., *Concepts of Deity*, p. 19). Wolterstorff claims for God's eternity the second sense in its stronger form, that is, that God has no beginning and no end, yet still, within time. He explains why a God who acts in history cannot be timeless but everlasting in two articles: (a) WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», in WOLTERSTORFF, N., *Inquiring About God*, pp. 133-156, and (b) WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», in WOLTERSTORFF, N., *Inquiring About God*, pp. 157-181.

²⁸² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 158.

Scripture's presentation of God unless one has good reason not to do so»²⁸³. It is because, generally, in any discourse, the *default option* is to take the discourser as speaking literally, unless substantial reasons exist that it is otherwise. To take the speaker to be speaking not literally is to bear the burden of proof²⁸⁴. Specifically, whatever in the literal interpretation of the Bible that is in conflict with what Augustine calls «purity of life or soundness of doctrine», then that is a reason good enough for not interpreting it literally²⁸⁵. Now, when this principle stands next to the claim that the Bible presents God as having a history, it implies that those who hold that God is timeless bear the burden of proof of explaining why we should not accept as literally true this biblical presentation of God. Wolterstorff argues: «The massiveness of the tradition has not shifted the burden of proof; what it does instead is place on those of us who disagree with the theological tradition a weighty obligation... But the burden of proof remains on them... Otherwise what's left of the church's confession that Scripture, for it, is canonical?»²⁸⁶

Commenting on this principle, Paul Helm says that its application would incline one «to be an ontological minimalist in respect of the divine nature», since instead of taking God, as the Bible presents Him, to be «ontologically immutable» in His very being or nature, we take Him as immutable only in His resolve²⁸⁷. William Lane Craig thinks it naïve to take this hermeneutic principle because it is «insensitive to the genre(s) of Scripture»²⁸⁸. While our author simply denies Helm's contention, he argues that Craig's criticism «is based on a misunderstanding»²⁸⁹. But I think that whatever this principle may

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁸⁴ Wolterstorff adds that if the literal, metaphorical or ironical meaning of one's words were something that is always readily obtainable, «one's interpretation of one's fellows could never get off the ground» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 158).

²⁸⁵ «Whatever appears in the Divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative» (AUGUSTINE, *On Christian Doctrine*, III, 10, 14, ROBERTSON, D. W., JR. (trans.), The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., New York, 1958, p. 88).

²⁸⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», pp. 159-160.

²⁸⁷ «How would Nick approach the representation of God as being surprised?» (HELM, P., «Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff», in GANSSE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time...*, p. 215).

²⁸⁸ CRAIG, W. L., «Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff», in GANSSE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time...*, p. 222.

²⁸⁹ Wolterstorff holds that texts all by themselves do not have any fixed sense; hence, they don't provide all by themselves either good or bad reasons for taking some sentence literally (cf. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Response to Critics», in GANSSE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time...*, pp. 225-238). This idea will be discussed in Chapter III.

come into, it should not suggest that we can read our view on God and time directly from the few relevant biblical texts. As Ganssle himself notes, «What the Bible will do for us, however, is provide the parameters for any adequate understanding of God's relation to time»²⁹⁰.

With this hermeneutic tool at hand, Wolterstorff surveys the Sacred Scripture to find out any literal passage that tells us about God's timelessness and immutability. He concludes that the closest he could find provides no substantial support to the claim²⁹¹. Instead, it makes clear that God is not a passive observer but an active agent in human history. He creates the world and sustains it in its existence. God's intervention culminates in the history of redemption upon knowing the misery that befalls His creation when human beings decided to stay away from Him. «Aware of what is going on, God has resolved, in response to the sin of human beings and the resultant evils, to bring about renewal. God has, indeed, already been acting in accord with that resolve, centrally and decisively in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ»²⁹². Wolterstorff holds, then, that God's temporality can be demonstrated on two accounts: on God's action in the world and on God's knowledge of facts. Divine action and omniscience are the backbones of Wolterstorff's argument that God is everlasting. The analysis of these two requires that we examine what Wolterstorff takes to be the nature of time²⁹³.

²⁹⁰ GANSSELE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time...*, p. 11.

²⁹¹ With regards to divine timelessness, Wolterstorff examines Psalm 90 where the author says «from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God» (v. 2); 2 Peter 3:8, «With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day»; and John 8:58, «Before Abraham was, I AM». He concludes that the first supports, not divine timelessness but temporality; the second shows that there is duration in God; and the third, that Jesus is divine. «If I AM existed *before* Abraham, how could I AM be timeless?» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», pp. 160-161). As to God's immutability, Wolterstorff analyzes Malachi 3:6, which says, «I, the Lord, do not change»; Psalm 102, in which one finds «They will perish, but Thou dost endure» (v. 26); and James 1:17, «there is no variation or shadow due to change». His diagnosis is that these passages do not support divine immutability but rather «the doctrine of God's unswerving fidelity» if taken in their context (cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», pp. 153-154; WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», pp. 161-163).

²⁹² WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 133.

²⁹³ A collection of the latest studies of many top thinkers in the field offers a philosophical inquiry into the nature of time representing new perspectives and innovative methodologies including those that «illustrate the integral relationship between the philosophy of time and the empirical sciences» in BARDON, A., *The Future of the Philosophy of Time*, Routledge Studies in Metaphysics, New York, 2012.

- On the Nature of Time

Wolterstorff is a self-confessed adherent of what J. M. E. McTaggart calls the «A-series» theory of time. McTaggart, in a famous article published in 1908, denies the reality of time and claims that temporal order is mere appearance. In his argument, he distinguishes two ways in which positions in time can be ordered: the A-series and the B-series. He shows how the A-series is the essential and the fundamental determinant of time. But its inherent contradiction leads McTaggart to conclude that time is unreal²⁹⁴.

Accordingly, there are two ways by which we account for the reality of time. Events are said to be temporal, either (a) by their possession of the properties («A properties») of being *past*, *present*, or *future* (it is called «A-series»); or (b) by their relation of being *earlier*, *simultaneous*, or *later* («B relations») with respect to another event («B-series»). Events, processes, states and the like –not particular things– are the primary occupants of temporal positions, says Brian Leftow²⁹⁵. For Wolterstorff, an event «consists in something's actually having some property, or something's actually performing some action, or something's actually standing in some relation to something... They are not what *can have* occurrences. They are, rather, themselves occurrences»²⁹⁶. Now, B-series relations seem to be permanent since an event that is earlier or later than another event will always be so. But the A-series essentially involve change, for that which is future will become present and what is present will eventually become past.

Since it is «universally admitted that time involves change»²⁹⁷, without the A-series, B-series would not constitute time. Yet, the B-series cannot be reduced to A-series events, because, as McTaggart claims, there can be «a series of permanent relations to one another of those realities which in time are events – and it is the combination of this series with the A determinations which gives time. But this other series – let us call it the C-series – is not temporal, for it involves no change, but only an order»²⁹⁸. As to whether A-series

²⁹⁴ Cfr. MCTAGGART, J.M.E., «The Unreality of Time», in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, 17 (1908), p. 458; cfr. also MCTAGGART, J.M.E., *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2, BROAD, C. D. (ed.), The University Press, Cambridge, 1927, chapter XXXIII.

²⁹⁵ Cfr. LEFTOW, B., *Time and Eternity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2009, p. 18.

²⁹⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 136.

²⁹⁷ MCTAGGART, J.M.E., «The Unreality of Time», p. 459.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 461-462.

can be reduced to B-series temporal propositions is a matter of on-going debate among contemporary thinkers²⁹⁹.

For the adherents of the A-series view, time is objectively real and not just a mere feature of our subjective experience of reality. Even if there were no temporal minds, some events would still exemplify the property of occurring *now*. Hence, the fundamental temporal properties are *tensed* (it is also called the *tense* theory). Meanwhile, the B-series advocates claim that temporal properties are merely features of our experience of reality and that the most fundamental features of time are the relations of «before», «after», and «simultaneous with». Hence, A-series propositions can be reduced to B-series propositions (it is also known as the *tenseless* theory).

Given these two different pictures, Wolterstorff opts for the A-series on several grounds. Firstly, he holds that «What's fundamental in time is the *occurrence* of events – this for the most part having nothing to do with your and my temporal relationship to those events»³⁰⁰. An event cannot have its location in the B-series unless it *occurs* first. Its occurrence is what makes the *present* the basic temporal location. What is wrong with the B-series view «is that it treats past, present, and future as properties of events and regards these three properties as equal in status»³⁰¹. Past events have ceased to occur, and in this sense, they do not *exist* anymore. But they «exist» only in the sense that they become components of facts that can be referred to. Future events, however, cannot be referred to since they have not occurred yet; hence, they do not constitute as components of facts³⁰².

²⁹⁹ McTaggart's thesis became the *locus classicus* of the contemporary on-going debate on the nature of time. A year after the publication of his article, V. Welby already pointed out what he calls «a flaw in the glass through which we habitually observe and consider the whole subject of 'time'» (WELBY, V., «Mr. McTaggart on the 'Unreality of Time'», in *Mind*, New Series, 18/70 (April, 1909), p. 326). Welby is referring to the «motion-space» perspective of viewing time. Michael Dummet defends McTaggart's proof showing that time is unreal (cfr. DUMMET, M., «A Defense of McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time», in *The Philosophical Review*, 69/4 (October, 1960), pp. 497-504), while E. J. Lowe tries to show how McTaggart, despite Dummet's defense, commits a logical blunder in his argument on indexicals (cfr. LOWE, E. J., «The Indexical Fallacy in McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time», in *Mind*, New Series, 96/381 (January, 1987), pp. 62-70). Wolterstorff, himself, finds McTaggart's argument on the unreality of time incoherent, while he holds on to the objective reality of the A-series (cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 165).

³⁰⁰ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 166.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³⁰² Wolterstorff, recognizing different views among tense theorists on this point, maintains that «only when an event is occurring or has occurred can it be a component of facts and can it be

Secondly, Wolterstorff rejects the claim that A-series propositions are reducible to B-series terms and indexical strategies. Picking out of some event and then specifying the temporal position of all other events in relation to it, says our author, is a mere *ad hoc* strategy. For instance, in the sentence «*The police arrived after the murderer has escaped*», the police's arrival is *past* only because it occurred «after» the murderer's escape. The universal dating system of taking Christ's birth as reference for all succeeding events is another example. Besides, in the use of indexical strategy, Wolterstorff laments over the lack of ontological significance given to the distinction between past, present, and future³⁰³. Moreover, he also discards as mistaken the identity claim on the meaning of statements like «The World Trade Center's twin towers collapsed 10 years ago» and «The World Trade Center's twin towers collapse 10 years before 2011». He notes that both sentences have different entailments. The former entails nothing of the date of the collapse, the latter entails nothing about how long ago³⁰⁴.

Another difficulty of the tenseless theory, says Wolterstorff, is its incapacity to explain how to bring about something at a certain time, e.g., to turn on the radio to hear the one o'clock news³⁰⁵. One turns the radio when one believes that it is *now* one o'clock. But to have that belief, she needs to determine which events are occurring *now*. As Wolterstorff notes, «The tenseless theorist, for whom all dates and events have exactly the same ontological status, has no way of accounting for how we make that determination»³⁰⁶. Unless one makes use of the A-series, she cannot resolve to turn on the radio at one o'clock. Thus, Wolterstorff concludes,

the basic thesis of the tenseless theorist, that tense supervenes on our operation of the indexical system for specifying temporal location, cannot be sustained. Rather than tense supervening on our operation of the system,

referred to. There are lots of general facts about the future, but no facts having particular events as constituents» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 166).

³⁰³ In saying «The kettle is whistling *now*», the speaker claims no ontological status about the kettle's whistling, but rather, she is simply relating the whistling to her *saying* that it is whistling. If the «whistling» and the «saying» coincides in time, then the statement is true (cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 167).

³⁰⁴ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 168; cfr. also WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», pp. 141-145.

³⁰⁵ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 170.

³⁰⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 170.

we cannot operate the system without being able to pick out those events and dates that have the unique ontological status of occurring *now*. Knowing which events occur simultaneously with which (sic) falls short of knowing which ones *are occurring now*³⁰⁷.

This is a point that McTaggart already makes clear: B-series facts alone do not constitute time. However, I think the grounds by which Wolterstorff opts the A-series view do not warrant the claim that God is temporal. The A-series theory even faces more serious objections that Wolterstorff must confront if he wants to build his divine temporality account on solid grounds³⁰⁸.

Besides the alleged contradiction that McTaggart himself has pointed out in the A-series view, and against which Wolterstorff argues nothing except saying that it is incoherent, Ned Markosian cites at least two most influential arguments against the A theory³⁰⁹. One of these is based on the famous special theory of relativity in physics, which claims that absolute simultaneity does not exist. If this is true, then, no objective facts about A properties, e.g., «*e* is present», exist; hence, the passage of time cannot be objectively real³¹⁰. Another argument concerns particularly the alleged passage of time. If time really passes, then a coherent answer would give sense to the question «How fast time passes?» But the rate «one hour per hour» cannot be coherently assigned to the passage of time. Thus, it cannot be true, as the A theory claims, that time objectively passes.

As we have seen, the contemporary debate on the nature of time is far from over. However, Wolterstorff does not pretend to construct an argument for the «everlastingness» of God solely on the basis of his choice of the A theory of time. Instead, the fundamental basis of his claim is the Sacred Scripture. He says that his reflections on the nature of time is relevant only inas-

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁰⁸ The open debate on whether or not tensed facts are ineliminable or reducible to B-series facts seems to indicate this (see Helm's objection and Wolterstorff's reply, respectively, in GANSLE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time...*, pp. 214-218, 229-231).

³⁰⁹ Cfr. MARKOSIAN, N., «Time», in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, February 26, 2005, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/time/>> [Last consulted: November 15, 2011].

³¹⁰ Markosian notes that A theorists have two options: deny the relativity theory or deny that it actually entails the non-existence of absolute simultaneity. While the first option is unpopular among A theorists, the second one is promising. But it faces the task of providing just what the relativity theory entails with respect to absolute simultaneity. (cfr. MARKOSIAN, N., «Time», p. 15).

much as it aims at getting a deeper understanding of what the biblical presentation of God as having a history implies. He says,

we will emerge with a deeper understanding of how much of the biblical presentation of God has to be given up if one holds that God is timeless. The discussion will be a specimen of the Anselmian project of faith seeking understanding: the believer seeking to understand something of the «why» of what already he or she believes³¹¹.

Thus, given his own understanding of the nature of time and his commitment to what he believes to be the biblical orthodoxy, Wolterstorff argues for God's everlastingness on two grounds: divine action and divine omniscience³¹².

3.3.2. Divine Omniscience and Temporality

- If God's action is historical, then, God is temporal

In the preceding discussion, it is clear why events are obviously temporal. But in the case of non-events like substances, properties, numbers and the like, Wolterstorff proposes «that we take whether or not something has a history as the determinant of whether or not it is in time»³¹³. Since human persons and animals have a history, they are temporal. Numbers are timeless because they do not have history. Does God have a history?

Wolterstorff's affirmative answer is grounded on the theistic assumption that God acts in history and that the biblical narrative is a proof to that. He argues that God performs actions at different moments of time –in creation, in providence, and for the renewal of humankind– and the succession in the-

³¹¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 164.

³¹² Edward R. Wierenga notes that God's everlastingness recently «has reached the status of a new orthodoxy among philosophers of religion». But considering that these two arguments in favor of divine temporality are mere objections to timelessness, he deems them as unpersuasive. For his discussion, see WIERENGA, E. R. «Timelessness out of Mind», in GANSSLE, G. E. and WOODRUFF, D. M. (eds.), *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 153-164.

³¹³ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Unqualified Divine Temporality», p. 172. But Padgett notes that this definition lacks precision as «Time and history are not identical... not everything that is temporal has a history» (PADGETT, A. G., «Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff», in GANSSLE, G. E. (ed.), *God and Time...*, p. 220). Padgett offers Nelson Pike's more precise definition: «something is timeless if it is not located at any time and has no extension in time» (PIKE, N., *God and Timelessness*, Routledge, London, 1970, p. 7).

se actions, i.e. their presence and absence on God's time-strand, constitutes changes in God³¹⁴. Basically, he assumes that no timeless God can cause temporal changes, for «the temporality of the event that God acts on infects God's own action with temporality»³¹⁵.

Moreover, Wolterstorff holds that if God interacts with free human actions, then, He must be in time. «Some of God's actions must be understood as a response to the free actions of human beings... I think it follows, given that all human actions are temporal, that those actions of God which are 'response' actions are temporal as well»³¹⁶. But what compels that God's actions in time must also be temporal? I agree with Helm in noting that «an eternal God could eternally decree a response to what He knows will happen at a given time»³¹⁷. Wolterstorff refuses to call this eternalist view as divine responsiveness for, he says, it is not «located in the actual fabric of history»³¹⁸.

Besides, if God were eternal or timeless, then, «God could not be the object of any human action whatsoever»³¹⁹. Suppose that God is the object of a human act, e.g., *my referring to God*. This event is identical with another event of *God's being referred to by me*, and is an aspect both of God and of me. Now, if God lasts longer than does my act of *referring to God*, then, there is *succession* in God's time-strand, since for a while God is *being referred to by me*, and when I am gone, *my referring to God* ceases³²⁰. Hence, God is temporal and to say that He is timeless would be contradictory.

If God were eternal... one could not know that God was eternal, or even believe that God was... one could not predicate of God that God is eternal.

³¹⁴ Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 145. For Wolterstorff, «X is eternal if and only if X has no aspect that is a member of the temporal array». *Temporal array* is «a set of events (or a union of time-strands) such that each member stands to every member in one of the temporal-order relations (precedence, succession, simultaneity), and such that no member stands to any event which is not a member in any of these relations». A *time-strand* is a «set of a given entity's aspects such that each member bears a temporal-order relation to every member of the set...» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 137).

³¹⁵ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 150.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³¹⁷ HELM, P., «Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff», p. 216.

³¹⁸ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «Response to Critics», p. 233.

³¹⁹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 153.

³²⁰ However, it can be argued that God's *being referred to by me* is accidental to God. How can an accidental property inflict an essential change (succession) in the subject? My constant *thinking of being able to fly* does not convert me in *Superman*.

For predicating is also a temporal act... if one predicates of God that God is eternal, then God is not³²¹.

All of these arguments rest on the basic assumption that it is self-contradictory to affirm that a timeless God can bring about temporal actions. However, this apparent contradiction will disappear if we consider that fundamental to theism is the claim «that God and the world are ontologically distinct. God's creative act never merges with the entities it creates»³²². Hence, temporal actions do not necessarily entail a temporal agent as temporal effects do not require a temporal cause. Another argument that Wolterstorff advances appeals to divine omniscience.

- If God knows what day is today, then, God is historical

Given Wolterstorff's commitment to the A theory of time, it seems that God's omniscience becomes incompatible with timelessness. He holds that if God is truly omniscient, then, He must know not only B-series but also A-series facts³²³. Now, since A-series facts change because what is present will be past and was future, what God knows also changes, because *tomorrow* He will know that «Today is Friday» and that «Yesterday was Thursday»³²⁴. God must know something different at different times. His knowledge, then, is tensed and historical, and perforce, God is temporal. Conversely, if God has no history, then, He lacks tensed knowledge and cannot be omniscient for He does not know what day is *today*. Consequently, God could neither intervene nor respond to what transpires in the world since to do so, He needs tensed knowledge. Thus, «If God were eternal, God's action would have to be entirely non-interventionist»³²⁵.

What Wolterstorff's objection amounts to is simply that mental acts and states are temporally conditioned. But unless it is inherently contradictory

³²¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 153.

³²² OWEN, H. P., *Concepts of Deity*, p. 22.

³²³ For instance, God must know not only that the Twin Towers collapsed *before* the death of Blessed Pope John Paul II but He must also know *today* that «It is Thursday».

³²⁴ «Since those facts come and go, God's knowledge of them comes and goes... For one can know that something is presently happening only when it is; the knowledge that some event is occurring can occur only when that event itself is occurring. The endurance of the knowledge exactly tracks the endurance of the event» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 175).

³²⁵ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 175.

to say that «Knowing can be atemporal», why should we assume that all acts of knowing is temporal?³²⁶ Thus, one quick eternalist reply to this objection would be to affirm that God's knowledge is atemporal; hence, to say that He knows something different at different times is senseless. Ganssle expresses a similar point saying «It is not true, it will be insisted, that God knows something *today*. He knows things *about* today but he knows these things timelessly»³²⁷. However, this is exactly what the temporalist denies: that God is eternal and that He knows eternally. So we must face the objection squarely from the temporalist viewpoint.

Some eternalists affirm that indexical sentences express the same propositional content as non-indexical ones, so that by replacing the former with the latter, we can see that God's knowledge does not need to change. After all, indexical terms like «yesterday», «today», «tomorrow», and «now» simply refer to different temporal locations used in different contexts and the meaning of the sentences that contain them also depends upon the context of its use³²⁸. Thus, «I am writing *now*» may be replaced with «I am writing on November 17, 2011 at 12:30 P.M.» without expressing two different thoughts. God knows the timeless truth expressed in the latter sentence regardless of the time it is uttered. However, temporalists –Wolterstorff in particular– deny that temporal propositions («event *e* occurs at t_1 ») are identical with indexical propositions («event *e* occurs *now*»). A-series facts are irreducible to B-series facts. Hence, God may know all non-indexical temporal propositions but He remains ignorant –if He is eternal– of what is happening *now*. To know it, God must be in time.

A possible response to Wolterstorff's claim that divine omniscience requires temporality is to hold that God is not *propositionally* but *factually* omniscient³²⁹. God knows every fact (that I am writing *now*) but His access to it is not propositional (not through the sentence «I am writing *now*»), for this is accessible only by indexically located minds. We know facts through our

³²⁶ Owen rightly notes that to say «A mental act can be non-temporal» is contradictory only «if we knew a non-temporal mode of being, and if we knew that it cannot be compatible with a mental mode; but we do not possess either form of knowledge» (OWEN, H. P., *Concepts of Deity*, pp. 20-21).

³²⁷ GANSSE, G., «God and Time», in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, April 30, 2007, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-time/>> [Last consulted: November 16, 2011].

³²⁸ GANSSE, G., «God and Time», <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-time/>>.

³²⁹ Cfr. WIERENGA, E. R. «Timelessness out of Mind», pp. 153-156.

temporal and spatial locations and we express them through indexical propositions. Although God also knows these facts, spatio-temporal indexicals impede Him to access them through propositions because He is outside time and space. However, I agree with Ganssle that this answer is problematic since it compromises God's omniscience.

One promising reply involves the denial of God's knowledge as propositional. William Alston argues that God knows what He knows without having any beliefs. His knowledge constitutes a direct awareness of facts involved³³⁰. If this is true, then, we safeguard God's omniscience while avoiding Wolterstorff's objection because God needs not know tensed propositions of facts in order to know and to intervene in the temporal world. As Ganssle observes, «if God's knowledge of a fact consists in the presence of that fact to God's consciousness, it may be that this presence does not affect God intrinsically. If this is the case, God can be aware of different facts in their different temporal locations without himself changing»³³¹. Hence, God can be eternal. However, a more defensible theory for divine eternity requires accounting for the relation between temporality and timelessness.

3.3.3. Time and Eternity

Wolterstorff's objections against the doctrine on divine eternity could be reduced into the question on the relationship between time and eternity. How can an eternal being intervene in time? How can a timeless cause bring about temporal effects? The charge of incoherence against the doctrine rests solely on the assumption that between timelessness and temporality, no relationship is conceivable. To assume otherwise would be absurd as it would entail a relation of simultaneity between time and eternity. If God is eternal, then past, present and future exist all at once in God. On this view, Anthony Kenny says, «my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity... the great fire of Rome is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these very words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on»³³². I hold that a coherent account for the relation between time and eternity is tenable and defensible.

³³⁰ Cfr. ALSTON, W. P., «Does God Have Beliefs?» in *Divine Nature and Human Language*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1989, pp. 178-193.

³³¹ GANSSE, G., «God and Time», <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-time/>>.

³³² KENNY, A., *The God of the Philosophers*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, pp. 38-39.

To explain such relation, Aquinas claims that while effects may be temporal their cause may not always be. Adopting Boethius' definition³³³, Aquinas emphasizes that nothing is wrong with saying that «God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed *at that time* when, from all eternity, He ordained it»³³⁴. A logical implication of this view, says Wolterstorff, is that God cannot respond to our human affairs because «Responsiveness would require tensed knowledge on God's part»³³⁵. However, I think Wolterstorff's premise is valid only if the A theory of time is true since it restricts the notion of responsiveness to this theory. Hence, unless we establish the truthfulness of *tense* theory, to conclude that an eternal God cannot respond to temporal human affairs is unacceptable and Aquinas' solution remains intact.

The Kenny-type absurdity, as well as Wolterstorff's difficulty in accounting for the relation between God's timeless knowledge and the temporal nature of its objects would *only* come into view if we want to capture such relation in strictly temporal terms, as both thinkers do. Kenny finds it absurd that, in God's knowledge, Rome is still burning while I am writing this thesis. Wolterstorff could not imagine how God could respond to our prayers if He is timeless since, naturally, if it is truly a *response*, then, it must follow *after* our prayer is made. And God must know what we are praying *now* in order to respond to it. But what Kenny is contemplating is temporal simultaneity. What Wolterstorff is thinking is temporal *succession*. Besides, the claim that *tensed* knowledge is necessary to bring about God's response remains debatable³³⁶.

³³³ «Eternity is the whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of limitless life, which we can better understand perhaps by comparing it to temporal things» (BOETHIUS, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, V, SLAVITT, D. R. (trans.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008, p. 168).

³³⁴ ScG, II, 35. (Emphasis is mine.) I take «that time» to refer to the specific moment in time when the effect of God's action takes place.

³³⁵ WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 175. He says, «none of God's actions is a response to what we human beings do... nothing at all in God's life is a response to what occurs among God's creatures» (WOLTERSTORFF, N., «God Everlasting», p. 174).

³³⁶ Moreover, there's the unresolved question on whether or not God's knowledge is *tensed*. It can also be argued that, as my mother knows that I would always ask for chocolate cake every time I come home and prepares it, analogically, God also can dispose from all eternity whatever we need so that His response in time to our needs does not necessarily depend upon His knowing that we need them *now*. In this picture of God's response, the bringing about of the response is eternal and does not need any *tensed* knowledge. But the effects are in time and have to attend to the *present* need.

With Ganssle, I agree that the relation between time and eternity «cannot be captured by using strictly temporal relations such as simultaneity because temporal simultaneity is a transitive relation»³³⁷. What we need, then, is a non-transitive notion that will allow us to see temporal changes as effects of eternal causality. If we can find such a notion –which I think, is highly tenable– then, Wolterstorff’s basic assumption that no eternal being can bring about temporal effects will be rendered inoperative in his argumentation. However, I submit that such non-transitive notion can hardly be found in the A-series view of time. For on this view, events are objectively past, present and future, regardless of their relation to any minds. Thus, at the outset, any non-transitive relation is already shut off. Helm could be right in observing that since, in the B-series view, events are tenselessly related to each other, it could help us find a non-transitive notion of relation «by enabling us to think of the temporal series from a standpoint that is indifferent to any point within it. From this it is a short step to thinking of God as occupying a standpoint outside that series, a timeless standpoint that entails a tenseless relation between all events but which is not entailed by it»³³⁸.

With the aim of finding such a non-transitive concept of relation, Stump and Kretzmann introduce the notion of «ET (eternal-temporal)-simultaneity»³³⁹, which may exist between what is eternal and what is temporal or, to be more exact, between an eternal reference and a temporal reference. In this view, both authors argue that for someone who occupies an eternal reference frame, two temporal events at different temporal positions can both be present (eternally), being ET-simultaneous, while not being simultaneous with each other for someone occupying a temporal reference frame. «For every x and for every y , x and y are ET-simultaneous, if and only if (i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice versa; and (ii) for some observer, A, in the unique eternal reference frame, x and y are both present-i.e., either x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, or vice versa; and (iii) for some observer, B, in one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames,

³³⁷ GANSLE, G., «God and Time», <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-time/>>.

³³⁸ HELM, P., «Eternity», in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, February 4, 2010, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/eternity/>>, [Last consulted: November 16, 2011], p. 9.

³³⁹ Cfr. STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity», in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78/8 (August, 1981), pp. 429-458. Ganssle comments that most of the contemporary discussion on timelessness begins with this article.

x and y are both present-i.e., either x is observed as eternally present and y is temporally present, or vice versa»³⁴⁰.

The theory may seem promising but contemporary philosophers point out its alleged inherent difficulties. Delmas Lewis, insisting on the temporal-eternal divide, attempts to prove as incoherent the ET-simultaneity on the ground that «temporal observers *and their observations* occur in time, and thus any eternal x *must* exist at the same time that any temporal y observes x »³⁴¹. William Hasker also raises similar objection³⁴². But Stump and Kretzmann notes that Delmas and Hasker's objections depend on the general principle that no event can be epistemically or metaphysically present to any being unless both share the same mode of existence – a claim which, Stump and Kretzmann say, is incompatible with the ET-simultaneity. On this principle, to be metaphysically present to an eternal being, a thing must be eternal itself. To be directly aware of a temporal event requires being temporal oneself. But I think the principle begs the question for it presupposes a metaphysical and epistemological irreconcilable divide between time and eternity, exactly the problem in question. Stump and Kretzmann has successfully shown that this principle is false because it cannot be applied to space. If God, who is non-spatial can be directly aware of spatial beings, without sharing their *spatial* mode of existence, why can't He do so without sharing their *temporal* mode of existence?³⁴³ But to avoid this type of objection, they modify the ET-simultaneity definition by adding that temporal events are situated with respect to observers occupying an eternal and temporal reference frames in such a way that these observers «can enter into direct and immediate causal relations with each of them and (if capable of awareness) can be directly aware of each of them»³⁴⁴.

The ET-simultaneity theory also faces serious opposition with regards to its concept of atemporal duration³⁴⁵. Helm notes its mere *ad hoc* character

³⁴⁰ STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity», p. 439.

³⁴¹ LEWIS, D., «Eternity Again: A Reply to Stump & Kretzmann», in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 15 (1984), p. 75.

³⁴² «If... the world really is temporal, only a temporal God can be immediately aware of it – and then only of its *present*, not of its past or future» (HASKER, W., *God, Time and Knowledge*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1989, p. 169).

³⁴³ Cfr. STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity, Awareness, and Action», in *Faith and Philosophy*, 9 (1992), p. 476.

³⁴⁴ STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity, Awareness, and Action», pp. 477-478.

³⁴⁵ Herbert J. Nelson argues that the notion of an infinitely extended atemporal duration is flawed (cfr. NELSON, H. J., «Time(s), Eternity, and Duration», in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 22 [1987], pp. 3-19).

and deems it unnecessary, as it only tries to do justice to Boethius' definition of eternity³⁴⁶. Paul Fitzgerald argues for the serious incoherence between timelessness and duration. Anything that counts as extension must meet three formal features: (1) «two distinct particulars can both have the kind of extension in question», (2) «two particulars may both have the same or a different amount of the mode of extension in question»; and (3) «by having different positions along the extensive dimension in question two qualitatively identical particulars can be numerically distinct»³⁴⁷. If God has timeless duration, then, two or more of divine thoughts will have either the same or different amounts of duration or are numerically distinct. But this entails succession; hence, temporality. And unless this eternal duration has analogues with temporal duration, it would not qualify as *bona fide* duration. But if it qualifies as duration, on what ground it is timeless?

I think Stump and Kretzmann's reply is quite decisive³⁴⁸. They rightly note that the eternity doctrine is incoherent only if we assume that all extensions must be divisible; hence, successive. But «in assuming that the denial of succession is a denial of an extended mode of existence Fitzgerald begs the question»³⁴⁹. Besides, given that all temporal and spatial extensions are potentially or conceptually divisible, as is generally undisputed, «nothing in that fact... provides good grounds for inferring that what is atemporally extended must also be divisible»³⁵⁰.

³⁴⁶ Helm holds that Kenny's objection will stand only if we think of eternity as a timeless duration. «But there is no compelling reason to think that timeless eternity is a kind of time, or that it has aspects of duration... To say that everything is present to God is not to suppose that everything is temporally present to God, that God has an experience of everything happening at once» (HELM, P., «Eternity», p. 11). Besides, whether Boethius really holds a timeless duration in God or is it just a matter of posterior interpretation is still debatable today.

³⁴⁷ Cfr. FITZGERALD, P., «Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity», in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (1985), pp. 262-263.

³⁴⁸ Cfr. STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald», in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (1987), pp. 214-219.

³⁴⁹ STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity, Awareness, and Action», p. 466. Stump and Kretzmann extend to Fitzgerald Thomas Reid's decisive criticism of John Locke, who derives the idea of duration from the idea of succession. Reid says, «We may measure duration by the succession of thoughts in the mind, as we measure length by inches or feet; but the notion or idea of duration must be antecedent to the mensuration of it, as the notion of length is antecedent to its being measured» (REID, T., *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay III, Ch. V, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 328).

³⁵⁰ STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity, Awareness, and Action», p. 466. Stump and Kretzmann notes that some philosophers and physicists argue for extended but indivisible atoms

In defending timeless duration in God, Brian Leftow tries to avoid Fritztgerald's objection by introducing what he calls a *Quasi-Temporal Eternality* (QTE)³⁵¹. He holds that distinct moments exist in the life of an eternal God. These moments, though eternally sequential and successive, are not parts but points, since God has them all at once in one eternal *now*. Leftow's timeless duration shares features with temporal duration but without rendering God temporal. This is possible by distinguishing between *typically temporal properties* (TTPs) and *properties that make something temporal* (PMTs). Such distinction allows Leftow to suppose that God, though possessing some TTPs, cannot be temporal because it is not the mere possession of TTPs which makes a being temporal, but having the *right* TTPs. Besides, Leftow argues, most eternalists hold that God has TTPs and, similarly, no temporalist thinks that God has every TTPs³⁵². Timeless duration and *being present*, then, can be cases of TTP that God has but do not make Him temporal. So keen and promising is Leftow's analysis that, in Ganssle's words, it demonstrates how some objections to timeless duration and God's relation to a temporal world are not really decisive. «A timeless God can be present, though not temporally present, to the world. He can have a life which is an event having duration, though not temporal duration»³⁵³.

However, the notion of a timeless duration does not seem to convince Katherine Rogers who challenges the claim that timelessness in Boethius and other medieval thinkers includes duration³⁵⁴. Stump and Kretzmann represents time and eternity as two parallel lines in which the timeless line represents one indivisible present while the temporal line has points, each of which

of space or time. Cfr. SORABJI, R., *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, Duckworth, London, 1983 and KRETZMANN, N., «Continua, Indivisibles, and Change in Wyclif's Logic of Scripture», in KENNY, A. (ed.), *Wyclif in His Times*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, pp. 31-65.

³⁵¹ «The life of a being with QTE is an extension in which positions are ordered as earlier or later. Yet none of it 'passes away' or is 'yet to come'» (LEFTOW, B., *Time and Eternity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1991, p. 120). See also LEFTOW, B., «The Eternal Present», in GANSSE, G. E. and WOODRUFF, D. M. (eds.), *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 21-48. In this article, Leftow tries to show coherently that, on Boethius' view, though God's life is eternal, «there are events in it, and these events have what is typically a temporal property: they occur in a present» (p. 21).

³⁵² For instance, *being wholly future to some temporal event* is a property that God cannot possess though He is temporal because He has no beginning.

³⁵³ GANSSE, G., «God and Time», <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-time/>>.

³⁵⁴ Stump and Kretzmann take their cue from Boethius' definition of eternity which, according to both, includes the concept of duration. Leftow defends such claim.

is present one at a time³⁵⁵. In this picture, it seems that God's eternal life is stretched out alongside the temporal line. However, this geometrical analogy, says Rogers, is unfamiliar to medieval thinkers. For them, time and eternity is like a circle and a point at its center. Timelessness (the center dot) stands in the same relation to each point along the temporal array (the circle). The center point itself has no extension; hence, no duration³⁵⁶. As to Leftow's QTE, Rogers points out the dilemma it entails: either Leftow must argue for the distinction between *there being sequential moments* in God and *God experiences them all at once* or he must grant that *earlier and later moments* can be simultaneous in God's life. Rogers denies timeless duration but this does not imply a kind static existence. She likens God's relation to the world to human memory of the past. Just as we can recall a whole series of sequential past events in one present mental exercise, God, in his timeless *now*, can know non-sequentially the whole sequence of temporal events. But this does not require extension and duration in His eternal life.

However, Rogers' non-sequential divine knowledge of sequentially ordered temporal events seems to be as problematic as the atemporal duration for, again, it brings us back to the problem of time-eternity relation. I submit that Stump and Kretzmann have captured essentially Aquinas' notion of eternity that includes the element of timeless duration. In *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas holds as an unchallenged premise that «eternity signifies a kind of duration»³⁵⁷. At the same time, emphasizes that, being simultaneously whole, «eternity has no succession»³⁵⁸. As Stump and Kretzmann have shown, on Aquinas' account, a relation between time and eternity is clearly defensible and tenable.

As a summary, it becomes clear that the bulk of Wolterstorff's contention on divine temporality rests mainly on his commitment to what he believes to

³⁵⁵ Cfr. STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Atemporal Duration», p. 219.

³⁵⁶ Fitzgerald also notes that «This 'nondurational' or 'point' interpretation fits the '*totum simul*' formula insofar as that is construed simply as denying extensive magnitude» (FITZGERALD, P., «Stump and Kretzmann...», p. 264).

³⁵⁷ *S. TH. Ia*, q. 10, a. 1, obj. 2 & 6. Stump and Kretzmann argue, contra Herbert Nelson, that Aquinas' position has undergone a development. «It seems reasonable to infer that any worries Aquinas may have had at an early stage of his career about attributing duration to eternity he had abandoned some fourteen years later, when he wrote *S. TH. Ia*» (STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity, Awareness, and Action», p. 479, note no. 5).

³⁵⁸ *S. TH. Ia*, q. 10, a. 1, *respondeo*.

be Scriptural orthodoxy, coupled with his adherence to the A-theory of time. But both grounds can be contested – and are, in fact, being contested; hence, they cannot be considered decisive in favor of his position.

4. ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

As we have seen, the main objection against the doctrine of divine simplicity is two-fold: on its intrinsic coherence and on its systematic consistency with other theistic doctrines. As to the first, Wolterstorff limits himself in saying that it is merely a question of intuition. The question on coherence is just a matter of explaining the difference between two ontological styles – constituent and relational. Acceptance or rejection of the doctrine merely depends on what approach one is inclined to embrace. He rather dedicates much attention to the systematic objections thinking, perhaps, that in showing its inconsistencies, the intrinsic incoherence will just naturally show up and the doctrine will just die a natural death. If this analysis is correct, I deem Wolterstorff's move unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly Wolterstorff's merit to have shed more light on the contemporary bafflement over the simplicity doctrine. His constituent-relational ontology distinction, despite possible and reasonable objections against it, has clarified various fundamental points of disagreement between classical and analytic philosophy. With respect to the former, Wolterstorff's critique allows for a more lucid understanding of the classical doctrine and shows its necessity in the contemporary milieu. With regards to the latter, it provides a clearer view of the contemporary analytic position, which is necessary for a continued dialogue.

However, Wolterstorff's worth should not dazzle us exceedingly so as to overlook the danger of thinking that the question on divine simplicity is just a «conflict of intuition». The fundamental question is: Which ontological approach can provide us with a more comprehensive view of reality? While relational approach assures us that reality is intelligible, constituent approach guarantees that what we know is the objective reality. The exercise of right reason requires the recognition of both dimensions, most especially in its inquiry about a simple God. Only in this right exercise can reason –that natural light strengthened by faith– be «raised above itself in

contemplation insofar as it knows God to be everything that it naturally comprehends»³⁵⁹.

So far, Wolterstorff has not engaged in a fully developed critique against the intrinsic coherence of the simplicity doctrine, I guess, partly because he thinks Plantinga and others already had done it more than sufficiently that to offer his own critique may simply be redundant. However, as we have seen above, the doctrine's intrinsic incoherence is far from being demonstrated for, as Weigel wisely observes, the objections to its intrinsic character are basically characterized by either some presumptions favoring certain modern interpretations (or misinterpretations), or some neglect of its pillar concepts. On analytic interpretations, the simplicity doctrine is misunderstood as giving a positive description of God. Given its analytic relational approach, as Wolterstorff himself admits, such interpretation could never yield a positive diagnosis on the doctrine's internal coherence. Neither of its internal incoherence, I may add.

But Wolterstorff has not given a compelling motive why we should embrace the analytic reading of the doctrine. But we must insist that in its original conception, the simplicity doctrine is fundamentally apophatic³⁶⁰, for as Aquinas teaches repeatedly, we cannot know what God is, but only what He is not. This apophatic character should indicate the inadequacy of the relational ontological approach alone in inquiring about God. For, as we have seen, such approach intrinsically tends to be *constructive*, that is, describing positively what God is³⁶¹.

Nevertheless, the doctrine's apophatic character should not lead us to conclude that nothing can be known about God. We know that God exists by His effects although we do not really know what He is in His Essence. Wolterstorff rightly observes that, on the relational approach, the theistic identity

³⁵⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *On Boethius' On the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 2, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Selected Writings*, MCINERNEY, R. (ed. & trans.), Penguin Classics, London, 1998, p. 117.

³⁶⁰ «'Simplicity' is negative in its signification or meaning» (WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 28).

³⁶¹ By «constructive», I mean that the relational approach tends to compose two separately subsisting entities through some kind of relations. Intrinsically, it poses a problem when it is applied in inquiring about God: that God stands in relation with (exemplifies) divinity, omnipotence or other intrinsic abstract properties, compromises the notion of God as an Absolutely Perfect Being for it entails that God *is* by virtue of His relation with another entity. Anselm argues that God cannot be what He is «through another» (cfr. ANSELM, *Monologion*, I-IV).

claims are problematic. But it does not necessarily follow that the problem pertains to the intrinsic nature of the claims rather than to the inherent character of the approach. If, on this approach, analytic thinkers can hardly capture what Weigel considers as the central notion of Aquinas' version of the doctrine: God as Pure Act, which makes it possible to conceive of God as Subsistent Existence³⁶², why ascribe the problem to the doctrine rather than to the approach?

I submit that the principal problem is inherent in analytic philosophy to which Wolterstorff is inscribed. As Moros points out, its root could be traced back to Frege's distinction between names and predicates, or the logical and ontological abyss between what is singular and what is universal that this distinction entails. On this metaphysical chasm depends the relational character of analytic ontology³⁶³. Crossing such abyss without committing a «category mistake» is impossible.

But this problem manifests nothing but the Achilles' heel of analytic philosophy especially in its point of departure. Its overemphasis on the analysis of language or predication carries with it the unfortunate neglect of being *qua* being, and, consequently, the fateful disregard of the very important distinction that Aquinas emphasizes between ontological (real) and logical (predicative) being with all its consequences. Such negligence, I hold, is what lies behind the bafflement that contemporary analytic thinkers encounter with the simplicity doctrine. To resolve such perplexity, it is not enough to appeal to the intrinsic distinction between these two ontological styles.

Rather, what we need is to understand Wolterstorff's neat distinction between constituent and relational ontologies in the light of the classic distinction between *real* and *veridical* being. On Aquinas' account, that which is constitutive of reality (being as such or *real* being) is distinguished but not

³⁶² Cfr. WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, Chapter III, pp. 103-136. After presenting Aquinas' arguments for God's Pure Actuality, Weigel shows that Pure Actuality is Infinite Plenitude. God as Subsistent Existence is discussed in the following chapter (pp. 137-160).

³⁶³ «Me parece que en este punto se afronta el problema principal para la comprensión de la doctrina de la simplicidad en la filosofía analítica. En efecto, el problema tiene sus raíces en la distinción fregeana entre nombre y predicados; mejor incluso, en el abismo lógico y ontológico que entre singulares y universales establece esta distinción. De ella, a su vez, depende el carácter relacional de la metafísica analítica, según el cual los predicados son poseídos por un sujeto, pero no lo constituyen, ni lo puede constituir: un ser concreto no puede estar constituido de seres abstractos» (MOROS, E., *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga*, p. 143).

separated from its predicative conceptualization (being in proposition or *veridical* being)³⁶⁴. The act of being (existence) constitutes all that there is in reality (constituent approach). Yet, we conceive reality by predicating qualities of any subject; thus, representing reality as something composed of subject and predicate (relational approach). Weigel notes: «Divine simplicity implies the added complication that all things predicated of God are identical with the whole of God. Whatever the subject and predicate terms signify will be identical. In the case of ‘God exists’ the subject and the predicate terms both ultimately signify the whole of God. God is affirmed to be identical with God’s *actus essendi*. Here the subject term does not ultimately signify a form nor supposit for a substance, since according to Aquinas, God has no substantial or accidental forms to delimit Him and only composite beings are substances»³⁶⁵.

On the relational approach, it is easy to see how the subject *participates* in the predicate. Thus, Wolterstorff would say that God and creatures *participate* in abstract and subsistent perfections, like Goodness. However, accurate reasoning will tell us that the propositional or *veridical* being is distinct –though not separated from– ontological or *real* being³⁶⁶. Ontologically speaking, to say that God stands in relation with His abstract properties is to introduce ourselves into the dilemma of explaining the ontological status of these abstract objects and their relation to the Infinite Being. This may entail fatal consequences on the doctrine on God’s Supreme Perfection and Sovereignty. With this line of thought, we run the risk of creating God in our own image and likeness.

Needless to say that Aquinas’ *real-veridical* distinction of being is a *conditio sine qua non* for a more profound understanding of the divine simplicity doctrine as it sheds light over the contemporary confusion over the doctrine. Moreover, the resolution of such bafflement should proceed from a prior

³⁶⁴ Cfr. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* II, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1. For a brief but substantial, easy to read discussion of ‘Being’ and its uses, see WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, pp. 68-77.

³⁶⁵ WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 72.

³⁶⁶ Anthony Meredith points out how Gregory of Nyssa already emphasizes that «in God there is no question of participation in goodness» and that «only where there is no participation of the subject in the predicate can there be true simplicity» (MEREDITH, A., «The Divine Simplicity: *Contra Eunomium* I. 223-241», in MATEO-SECO, L. F. and BASTERO, J. L. (eds.), *El «Contra Eunomium I» en la Producción Literaria de Gregorio de Nisa: VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1988, p. 345).

examination of the inadequacy of relational approach, complementing such insufficiency with constituent ontology, to the recuperation of the classical notion of God as Pure Actuality and Subsistent Existence, with the aim of establishing firmly the doctrine's inherent coherence³⁶⁷. Once intrinsic coherence is demonstrated, objections on the doctrine's systematic incoherence with other theistic claims will simply appear as a problem of interpretation. If the divine simplicity doctrine is intrinsically and rationally coherent, then, it cannot –when properly understood– defy revelation and faith since «both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God... hence there can be no contradiction between them»³⁶⁸. Thus, divine simplicity, *contra* Wolterstorff, can neither be incoherent with the Sacred Scripture nor with the exercise of right reason.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a matter of conclusion, we may affirm the following. First, Wolterstorff, in seeking a better understanding of his faith, inquires about the doctrine on divine simplicity but found it difficult to sustain owing to his relational ontological perspective. A brief survey of the contemporary debate on the question only shows that our author's and other analytic thinkers' rejection of the doctrine is quite premature and unwarranted, for they failed to prove its intrinsic and systematic incoherence.

Second, Wolterstorff's distinction between constituent and relation ontology is, indeed, enlightening as it explains the contemporary bafflement over the simplicity doctrine. However, an engagement with our author's discussions on divine immutability, eternity and omniscience demonstrates that the problem lies not in the simplicity doctrine itself but in the relation ontological approach to reality.

In view of this, I have argued for the centrality of the doctrine of simplicity in Western theism. But inquiring about a simple God requires that we

³⁶⁷ It is important to note how, for Aquinas, to be supreme actuality and existence is «tantamount to being supremely perfect and good. In this way, the two pillars of the doctrine of simplicity, God as Pure Act and Subsistent Existence, form the bedrock of the account of the divine perfection and goodness» (WEIGEL, P., *Aquinas on Simplicity...*, p. 40).

³⁶⁸ *FR*, no. 43; cfr. also *SCG*, I, 7.

recuperate Aquinas' notions of Pure Act and Subsistent Existence. Besides, I suggest that Aquinas' distinction between real and veridical being fill up the deficiency of relational ontology. Only in this way can we see the intrinsic coherence of the simplicity doctrine and its systematic consistency with Christian faith and revelation. Indeed, inquiring about a simple God illustrates how faith and reason can interact harmoniously like two wings that elevate the human spirit to the contemplation of truth.

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