

Properties, Conflation, and Attribution: the *Monologion* and Divine Simplicity

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One of the crucial metaphysical issues that has proven to be a great stumbling block for so many contemporary thinkers in their understanding and appraisal of the doctrine of divine simplicity is central to what one might call the “property-based metaphysics” of a great many contemporary thinkers. It is the belief that properties are basic and invariant features of reality. This belief clearly makes the doctrine of divine simplicity seem irrational for if properties are indeed basic and invariant features of reality, then the claim that all of God’s properties are identical to each other cannot but sound absurd. But this, of course, begs the question: need properties be thought of as basic and invariant features of reality? This is the question that will be discussed here.

“Nullae igitur partes sunt in te, domine, nec es plura, sed sic es unum
quiddam et idem tibi ipsi, ut in nullo tibi ipsi sis dissimilis;
immo tu es ipsa unitas, nullo intellectu divisibilis.
Ergo vita et sapientia et reliqua non sunt partes tui, sed omnia sunt unum,
et unumquodque horum est totum quod es, et quod sunt reliqua omnia.”
(*Proslogion* XVIII)

The doctrine of divine simplicity has come under severe attack in recent times. Contemporary thinkers like William Hasker, Alvin Plantinga, and numerous others have all in one manner or another claimed that the doctrine is both unintelligible and not sound. Their reasons for so claiming are many. Quentin Smith has claimed that “this doctrine is plainly self-contradictory and its hold on people’s minds testifies to the predominance of faith over intellectual coherence in some Christian circles.”¹ Daniel Bennett has noted that it raises great questions with respect to divine knowledge.² William Hasker implies that it limits human freedom.³ Others have claimed that it compromises divine freedom. And the list of complaints regarding the doctrine could continue. This is not to say that all contemporary thinkers have attacked the doctrine. Eleanore Stump and the late Norman Kretzman, Lawrence Dewan,⁴ Brian Leftow,⁵ Katherine Rodgers,⁶ William Mann,⁷ and again numerous others have attempted in

¹ Quentin Smith, “An Analysis of Holiness,” *Religious Studies* Vol. 24 No. 4 (1988) 524 n. 3.

² Daniel Bennett, “The Divine Simplicity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) 633 n. 6.

³ William Hasker claims that some of the necessary requisites of divine simplicity—immutability, impassivity, timelessness, and so on—do not hold of God. The paradox of divine foreknowledge of human free acts leads him to argue that immutability is not one of the divine properties. The fact that the effects of God’s acts can be temporal leads him to argue that God is not timeless. See William Hasker, *God Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) and Clarke Pinnok, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, David Basinger, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994). See also William Hasker, “Simplicity and Freedom: A Response to Stump and Kretzman,” *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986) 192–201.

⁴ Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the Divine Simplicity,” *The Modern Schoolman* LXVI (1989) 141–151.

⁵ Brian Leftow, “Is God an Abstract Object,” *Nous* 24 (1990) 581–596.

⁶ Katherine Rogers, “The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity,” *Religious Studies* 32 (1996) 165–186.

various ways to defend the doctrine, its intelligibility, and its soundness. They have not only attempted to show those who deny that the doctrine is intelligible but also how the doctrine is to be understood. They have also forwarded reasons which would show how divine simplicity is compatible with divine freedom⁸ and human freedom, divine knowledge, and so forth.

My concern in this article is not to address the reconcilability of freedom—divine or human—and divine simplicity. Nor is it to address any of the many other thorny problems which philosophers since Boethius at least have agreed emerge thanks to the doctrine: problems such as the efficacy of human prayer, God’s knowledge of future contingents, and the “co-existence” of God and evil. One’s solution to these problems, it would seem, presupposes a specific stance on the matter of divine simplicity, rather than dictate it. If one accepts the doctrine of divine simplicity, or indeed considers it a metaphysical necessity, then he will not consider problems of this sort evidence against it. Rather, he will attempt to reconcile divine simplicity and freedom (human and divine), divine simplicity and human prayer, divine simplicity and the presence of evil, natural or otherwise. This is, for instance, what Boethius does in the *Consolatio*.⁹ If, on the other hand, one does not accept the doctrine, does not believe that it is metaphysically necessary—or indeed finds it metaphysically questionable—then he will simply consider each of these problems further evidence for eschewing it.

My intention is to discuss one of the crucial metaphysical issues that has proven to be a great stumbling block for so many contemporary thinkers in their understanding and appraisal of the doctrine of divine simplicity. This issue is central to what one might call the “property-based metaphysics” of a great many contemporary thinkers.¹⁰ It concerns properties. It is the belief that properties are basic and invariant features of reality. This belief clearly makes the doctrine of divine simplicity seem irrational.¹¹ If properties are indeed basic and invariant features of reality,

⁷ Cf. William E. Mann, “Divine Simplicity,” *Religious Studies* 18 (1982) 451–471, and “Simplicity and Immutability in God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* XXIII (1983) 267–276.

⁸ Cf. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985) 353–381.

⁹ I have argued this point elsewhere. See, “God, Simplicity, and the *Consolatio Philosophiae*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78 (2004) 225–246.

¹⁰ The primary tenet of what I call a “property-based” metaphysical system is that properties are to be considered “reality’s primitives.” That is, a “property-based” metaphysics minimally holds that: (1) all that is (entities, relations, actions, and so forth) can be understood in terms of properties and their relations, while (2) properties are only to be understood in terms of themselves. These basic tenets are and have clearly been understood in different ways. There seems to be no consensus among contemporary thinkers with respect to the nature of properties. With this said, “property-based” metaphysics are all strains of what medievalists would call *hyperrealism*. Like their medieval counterparts, contemporary “property-based” metaphysics in their many forms seem to stem from what medievalists call “the problem of universals.” There are clearly alternative ways of grounding one’s metaphysics. One of these would result in what I would call “substance-based” metaphysical systems. A “substance-based” metaphysics would minimally hold that (1) every existing entity is primarily a non-repeatable substance; (2) substances are “that to which it belongs not to exist in another.”

¹¹ Nicholas Woltersdorff makes something of a similar point: “It has become habitual for us twentieth-century philosophers, when thinking of essences, to think of things *having* essences, and to think of these essences as certain properties or sets of properties. An essence is thus for us an abstract entity. For a medieval, I suggest, an essence or nature was just as concrete [and individual] as that of which it is the nature ... 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

then the claim that all of God's properties are identical to each other cannot but sound absurd. To begin with, that claim flouts the invariance of properties. It should not at all be surprising, as such, that there are those contemporary thinkers who claim that divine simplicity is "hogwash."¹² The Anglo-American world of philosophy of religion is largely populated by those whose metaphysics is "property-based."¹³

But this, of course, begs the question: *need properties be thought of as basic and invariant features of reality?* This is the question with which this article will deal. The article itself will be divided into five primary parts in which I shall: (1) give an outline of the salient points of one of the most influential of the contemporary dismissals of the doctrine of divine simplicity: Alvin Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?*; (2) show how Plantinga's basic beliefs concerning properties inform Plantinga's dismissal of the divine simplicity; (3) discuss the interrelations between these basic beliefs; (4) turn to Saint Anselm's *Monologion* XV–XVII, and see how Saint Anselm deals generally with Plantinga's claims with respect to properties and attribution; and (5) discuss one of the reasons why Saint Anselm rejects Plantinga's view that properties are invariant features of reality.

Mine, then, will not be a true defense of the doctrine of divine simplicity. A defense would not just give reasons for not holding a belief which would make simplicity an impossibility. It would also give positive reasons for embracing divine simplicity. I take these reasons for granted, as necessarily following from two beliefs. The first, which should more properly be called a principle, is that "everything that is, endures and subsists so long as it is one."¹⁴ This is Boethius's formulation of the Aristotelian principle that unity is a transcendental property/attribute of being—that *ens et unum convertuntur*.¹⁵ The second belief is that God is the *Summum Ens*: the Being who most perfectly exemplifies what it is to be, or to use the Boethian definition again, is "*Id quod est esse*,"¹⁶ or again *Id quod* "*nihil melius excogitari queat*."¹⁷ If the former principle requires that God be a "unity," the latter requires that He be so to the highest possible degree. It is precisely reasons like these that have Saint Anselm claim: "sed sic es unum

of 'having.' Whereas for the medievals, *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 it." His point, then, is that since the medieval doctrine of divine simplicity uses the medieval definition of essence, the contemporary mind simply does not grasp the medieval doctrine. See Nicholas Woltersdorff, "Divine Simplicity," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991) 541–542.

¹² See, C. B. Martin, "God, the Null Set and Divine Simplicity," in *The Challenge of Religion Today*, ed. John King-Farlow (New York: Science History Publications, 1976) 140.

¹³ Not surprisingly, many of those contemporaries who attempt to defend the doctrine of divine simplicity propose non- "property-based" ways of attempting to think of "substances." See, e.g., William Mann's, "Divine Simplicity," and "Simplicity and Immutability in God;" Katherine Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity;" William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992) 508–525.

¹⁴ Cf. *Consolatio Philosophiae*, III, 11, 28–30: *Omne quod est tam diu manere atque subsistere quam diu sit unum.*

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., *Metaphysics*, Γ, 2, 1003^b 22–1004^a.

¹⁶ *Quomodo Substantiae*, 70.

¹⁷ *Consolatio*, III, 10, 25–26.

quiddam et idem tibi ipsi, ut in nullo tibi ipsi sis dissimilis; immo tu es ipsa unitas, nullo intellectu divisibilis.”¹⁸

Alvin Plantinga, Properties, and God

a. Plantinga and Divine Simplicity: *Does God Have a Nature?*

In his *Does God Have a Nature?*, Alvin Plantinga gives an admirably brief account of his reasons for dismissing the doctrine of divine simplicity.

There are two difficulties [with the doctrine], 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.¹⁹

The first, the “substantial difficulty,” Plantinga thinks, regards properties themselves. God cannot be simple, he claims, because one of the necessary conditions of divine simplicity is the identity of the divine properties. In order to be simple, in other words, God must necessarily have “only one property.” But it is ridiculous, he thinks, to claim that God has only one property. “It is an obvious fact that God has several properties” (p. 47). Indeed, the Bible makes numerous claims about God. It claims that God is just, that He is merciful, all-knowing, all-powerful, as well as a plethora of other things. This, Plantinga believes, necessarily entails that God has a multitude of different properties: the properties “just,” “merciful,” “all-knowing,” “all-powerful,” and so forth. For in no case can we think of the property “all-powerful” and the property “merciful” as being one and the same property. “Neither ... is identical to the other.” The same thing clearly holds of the properties “all-knowing” and “all-powerful.” Thus, Plantinga concludes, the claim that God is simple is untenable.

The second difficulty, the “truly monumental one,” on the other hand, concerns the relation between a being and its properties. For there is a second sort of identity necessarily

¹⁸ “You are so much one and the same with Yourself that in nothing are you dissimilar with Yourself. Indeed You are unity itself not divisible by any mind.” Translation by M. J. Charlesworth, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 98.

¹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980) 47.

involved in the claim that God is simple. This is the identity of God and his properties. A simple being can in no way be distinct from its properties. To be precise, no simple being can be in any way distinct from its *property*—since a simple being’s properties must all be identical to each other. But were God identical to his property, Plantinga claims, then, since “each of his properties is a property,” God Himself would have to be a property. And it is absurd to think of God as a property. A property is an abstract entity, and abstract entities do not act: “No property could have created the world.” Consequently, Plantinga concludes again, it is absurd to think of God as simple.²⁰ It “seems an utter mistake.”

This is not to say that Plantinga does not grasp at least some of the reasons why one would want to hold that God is simple. Simplicity, he realizes, preserves God’s “sovereignty-aseity.”

If God has a nature distinct from him, then there are things distinct from him on which he depends; and if the rest of the Platonic menagerie are distinct from him, then there are innumerable beings whose existence and character are independent of God. And doesn’t it seem that this compromises his sovereignty?²¹

The concession that there is a genuine “intuition” at the heart of the claim that God is simple leads Plantinga to forward a second interpretation of that claim. Those who believe that God is simple, he states, might mean by this not that the properties justice, let’s say, and mercy are *per se* identical, which would be “obviously absurd,” and that God is identical to them both, which would be an “utter mistake.”²² Rather, they might mean that justice and mercy are “identical in God”—that *God’s mercy* is “identical with” *God’s justice*—and that God is identical with his *being* both just and merciful:

For any properties P and Q in God, *God’s having* P is identical with *God’s having* Q and each is identical with God.

They might, in other words, mean that the “state of affairs” of God’s being just and God’s being merciful are identical, and that God is nothing but that “state of affairs.” This second way of

²⁰ There are a number of reasons why Plantinga’s two arguments in the passage we are dealing with are fascinating to a metaphysician with medieval inclinations and training. The most important, in my mind, is that they are virtually identical to the arguments through which Boethius both explicitly defends his distinction between essence and existence in composite things, and implicitly justifies his identification of essence and existence in God: that is, his adherence to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Compare *Quomodo Substantiae* 100–120. This fact indicates precisely what I was trying to state above: that it is one’s positions with respect to fundamental metaphysical issues like the ones we are dealing with—i.e. the nature of properties, what counts as reality’s primitives, etc. (see n. 10 *supra*)—as opposed to the cogency of the explicit arguments through which one justifies his understanding of the divine nature, that determine one’s understanding of the divine nature. It is precisely because Boethius and Plantinga have contrary positions on fundamental metaphysical issues like the ones we are discussing that they can use virtually identical arguments in order to come to contrary conclusions with respect to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²² *Ibid.*, 34 and 49.

understanding divine simplicity would, Plantinga continues, apparently salvage divine simplicity. It would make God's properties "logically equivalent:" they would "obtain" in all of the same possible worlds.²³

The problem with divine simplicity on this interpretation, he adds however, is that it would not safeguard that which it was formulated in order to safeguard: "God's sovereignty and aseity." This is so, Plantinga thinks, for two primary reasons. First, a "state of affairs," he apparently believes, is necessarily distinct from those properties which it exemplifies. Thus, if God were identical to a "state of affairs," Plantinga states, He would necessarily be "distinct from" those properties of which He is the exemplification. At the same time, however, those properties, with whose exemplification God would be identical if He were a "state of affairs," would themselves be "essential to God," precisely because God would be identical to their exemplification. As necessary to God, these properties would "exist in every possible world in which he does." This would make the properties themselves necessary: exist necessarily. After all, if God Himself is a necessary being ("he exists in every possible world"), then those properties which are necessary to God ("he essentially has such properties") must themselves be necessary: exist in every possible world, i.e. exist necessarily. What we would have on this interpretation of the doctrine of divine simplicity, Plantinga thinks as such, is that God's being a "state of affairs" would necessarily entail the existence of necessary properties, which are both distinct from God and necessary to God. That is, it would entail that the properties which God exemplifies are not dependent upon God, but rather that God is dependent upon the properties:

That they exist and have the characteristics they have is not up to him. And won't he be dependent upon them for his nature and character?²⁴

And this contradicts the "sovereignty-aseity" intuition which lies at the heart of the claim that God is not simple. Second, Plantinga claims, the claim that "for any properties P and Q in God, *God's having* P is identical with *God's having* Q and each is identical with God" entails that God is a state of affairs. And this is tantamount to claiming that God "is a mere abstract object" (p. 53), which is nothing but the "monumental" difficulty in a different guise.²⁵

b. Plantinga's Presuppositions Concerning the Nature of Properties

Plantinga's objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity are certainly stunning, and have been considered by many to be definitive. They do, however, also sport a number of important metaphysical presuppositions concerning properties. His second objection, the "monumental difficulty," makes one such presupposition apparent:

²³ Ibid., 50.

²⁴ Ibid., 52.

²⁵ Ibid., 53.

(p – 1) properties are necessarily abstract entities; they are necessarily abstract objects.

To be clear, God's being identical with all of his properties can *necessarily* entail that He is an abstract entity (as Plantinga claims it must), if and only if properties themselves are *necessarily* abstract entities.²⁶ That is, if Plantinga did not consider properties necessarily to be abstract entities, entities which are *necessarily* ontologically as well as epistemically distinct from those concrete entities whose properties they are, then he could well have derived the conclusion that God's properties are a concrete entity from the claim that God is identical to His properties. The reasoning here would have been simple enough. If God is identical to all of His properties, then since God is an actually existing non-abstract entity, His properties must be an actually existing non-abstract entity, which is nothing but God.²⁷ What bars Plantinga from drawing this conclusion from the identity of God and His properties, is precisely his belief that properties cannot but be abstract entities: that is, (p – 1).²⁸

But what exactly does it mean to claim that (p – 1) properties are necessarily abstract entities? I think the claim, in Plantinga's case, stems from at least two more basic claims regarding properties:

(p – 2) properties are necessarily logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations: they are necessary conditions of their instantiations;

(p – 3) properties are necessarily unchanging features of reality: features that do not vary in accordance with their instantiation.

The first of these—(p – 2) properties are logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations—is, of course, apparent in Plantinga's deducing that God would necessarily be a property if He were simple.²⁹ But it is especially evident in his third objection to the doctrine of

²⁶ That is, if properties are entities which are necessarily *ontologically*, and not just *epistemically* (or to put the point in medieval terms *really* as opposed to *intentionally*) distinct from the things whose properties they are, that is in those things in which they are instantiated.

²⁷ Namely, if we use G to stand for God, and P to stand for properties, rather than deriving:

(G=P); (P=abstract entity); (G=abstract entity), from the identity (G=P),

Plantinga could well have derived:

(G=P); (G=concrete entity); (P=concrete entity) from the identity (G=P).

Both derivations are viable.

²⁸ Plantinga explicitly embraces this first presupposition. "It is natural," he claims at the outset of *Does God Have a Nature?*, to think of properties, the "Platonic menagerie," as abstract objects which have "neither beginning nor end." "There was a time before which there were no human beings, but no time before which there was not such a thing as the property of being human or the proposition *there are human beings*. That property and that proposition have never *begun* to exist. Abstract objects are also naturally thought of as *necessary* features of reality, as objects whose non-existence is impossible. ... properties, propositions, numbers and states of affairs, it seems, are objects whose non-existence is quite impossible" (p. 4).

²⁹ One always reduces an identity to the most primitive member of that identity. Thus, since Anselm, Aquinas, and all those who accept the doctrine of divine simplicity consider God to be the most primitive member of the identity of God and His properties (G=P), they reduce the properties to God. That is, they claim that God is logically prior to

divine simplicity. In that objection, Plantinga argues that God's exemplifying or instantiating a property, "justice" let us say, His *being* just, is nothing other than His *having* the property "justice."³⁰ But God's having the property "justice," Plantinga continues, necessarily presupposes both:

- (α) that the property 'justice' is *itself* necessary (necessarily exists),
- and (β) that it is necessary *to* God.

It presupposes (α) that the property "justice" is necessary (that God is "distinct from" the property "justice"), Plantinga holds, because that the existence of that property is a necessary condition of God's exemplifying it. Plantinga's reasoning here would seem to be that nothing can exemplify a property which does not exist. God's *having* the property "justice" presupposes (β) that that property is necessary *to* God, on the other hand, because "justice" characterizes what God is: it is "essential to God," it makes God "be the way he is." But if the property "justice" is itself both (α) necessary, and (β) necessary to God, then that property must be logically and ontologically prior to God: it must be a necessary condition of God's being just. We can schematize the essential points of Plantinga's argument thus:

- (a) being just is nothing other than having the property "justice;"
- (b) having the property "justice" necessarily entails that the property "justice" is really distinct from the property's possessor or instantiator;
- (c) a property which is distinct from its instantiator necessarily exists in itself;
- (d) the property "justice" is a necessary condition of being's instantiating or exemplifying "justice" or "being just;"
- (e) if x is a necessary condition of y, then it is logically prior to y;
- (f) if x is a necessary condition of y's "being the way it is," then x is ontologically prior to y.
- (g) the property "justice" is necessarily logically and ontologically prior to its instantiations: to something's exemplifying or having the property "justice."³¹

His properties. By reducing the identity God and His properties ($G=P$) to a property, on the other hand, Plantinga shows that he holds that properties are the most primitive members of that identity. That is, that he holds that properties are logically prior to God.

³⁰ I realize that the specific argument I am relating concerns the claim that "God is a state of affairs." I believe that this does not alter the argument. Plantinga's specific points regarding states of affairs are clearly applicable to any instantiation or exemplification of properties.

³¹ Plantinga actually states most of these premises in his description of the relation between God and His omniscience: "Take the property *omniscience* for example. If that property didn't exist, then God wouldn't have it, in which case he wouldn't be omniscient. So the existence of omniscience is a necessary condition of God's being

It is clear that Plantinga believes this point to hold for any property and any instantiation.

To put the second of these more basic presuppositions—(p – 3) properties are necessarily unchanging features of reality: features that do not vary in accordance with their instantiation—in something which vaguely resembles mediaeval philosophical language, Plantinga takes properties necessarily to be *univocal and invariant features of reality*. This can be seen not just in his first objection to the doctrine of divine simplicity, the “substantial difficulty,” in which he claims that it is an “obvious fact” that God has several properties, since “he has both power and mercifulness ... neither of which is identical to the other.” It is also plain in the third objection when he claims that it is “obviously absurd” to claim that two properties can be identical.³²

Now, God’s being just can only be *necessarily* distinct from his being merciful (as Plantinga claims they must), if only if justice and mercy are *necessarily* univocal and invariant features of reality: that is, if the properties “just” and “merciful” must exist in the same way in all of those substances, individual things, or non-abstract things in which they are instantiated. If it is necessarily true that “power and mercifulness ... [are never] identical.” For if properties were not necessarily univocal and invariant features of reality—if they could exist in different ways in the different non-abstract individual things in which they are instantiated—then it would by no means be said that two properties which can in some instantiations be distinct properties, are necessarily distinct properties in all of their instantiations.³³

the way he is; in this sense he seems to be dependent upon it. Omniscience, furthermore, has a certain character: it is such that whoever has it, knows, for any proposition *p*, whether or not *p* is true. But its displaying this character is not up to God and is not within his control. God did not bring it about that omniscience has this character, and there is no action he could have taken whereby this property would have been differently constituted.... Furthermore, its existence, and its having the character it does are necessary conditions of God’s being the way *he* is” (6–7). See also *Does God Have a Nature?*, 34–35.

³² *Ibid.*, 49.

³³ I am thinking here of something like this. There are at least ten distinct properties, it would seem, which a just man, who most of us agree is a God-fearing man, should have. They are the properties listed by the Decalogue: being “God-honoring,” being “Sabbath respecting,” being “parent-honoring,” and so forth. Now, if properties were necessarily univocal and invariant features of reality, then three things at least would have to be true of being “just:” (1) every just or God-fearing man, must have at least all ten of the discrete properties listed by the Decalogue discretely; (2) no man could be called just or God-fearing if he did not have at least these ten discrete listed by the Decalogue properties discretely; and (3) the ten discrete properties which compose the set of properties identified with ‘God-fearing’ or “just” cannot in any way ever not be discrete.

But here is the problem. When Jesus is asked what one must be in order to be a God-fearing man, he claims: (4) that a man need only to be “God-loving” and “neighbor-loving” in order to be God-fearing; and (5) that by being “God-loving” and “neighbor-loving” a man will follow the Decalogue. And we must assume that by (5), Jesus means that (5¹) the “God-loving” and “neighbor-loving” man will have all of the ten properties which a God-fearing man must have. Jesus’s claim, in other words, is that the ten discrete properties which a God-fearing person must have can be had by having two properties.

Now, since we must suppose that Jesus did not think that those properties of the Decalogue which he did not list are not essential to the God-fearing person—it is absurd to think that Jesus did not think that being “God-honoring,” “Sabbath-respecting,” and “parent-honoring” are not essential to the God-fearing man, especially since He claimed that He came not to “abolish the law but to fulfill it”—we must suppose that Jesus was claiming that the man who follows His law will have all ten of the properties of the God-fearing person, by having just two properties of being “God-loving” and “neighbor-loving.” That is, the person who is “God-loving” and “neighbor loving” will

c. What Must be True of Properties in Order for Plantinga to be Right?

Much can and should be said about the three metaphysical presuppositions which inform Plantinga's rejection of the doctrine of divine simplicity. It is clear, for instance, that all three presuppositions combine to form what appears to be his most basic metaphysical belief, that:

(p – 4) properties are reality's primitives.³⁴

But rather than commenting on the combination of the three presuppositions as interesting as it is, I shall comment on their interrelations. I want briefly to focus on two out of what in effect are numerous points that could and should be made about these interrelations. First, Plantinga's presupposition that (p – 3) properties are necessarily unchanging features of reality is a necessary condition of his presupposition that (p – 2) properties are necessarily logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations. Second, Plantinga's presupposition that (p – 2) properties are necessarily logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations is one of the necessary conditions of his presupposition that (p – 1) properties are necessarily abstract entities. Naturally, (p – 3) properties are necessarily unchanging features of reality is another such condition.

The first point is implicit in Plantinga's own formulation of his third objection to divine simplicity. One of the necessary conditions of (p – 2) properties necessarily logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations is that properties are necessarily *really distinct* from their instantiations. Plantinga assumes this point. It is the second premise in my schematization of his argument in that third objection. The fact of the matter is, however, that one of the necessary conditions of holding that properties are necessarily *really distinct* from their instantiations is precisely that (p – 3) properties are necessarily unchanging features of reality. Properties can only be necessarily distinct from their instantiations if they are necessarily invariant features of reality: features that necessarily do not vary in accordance with their instantiation; features that necessarily exist in the same way in all of those non-abstract things in which they are instantiated. If properties do vary in accordance with their instantiation, if they exist in different ways in those different things in which they are instantiated, then the instantiators of those properties would be one of the necessary conditions of the properties

also be "God-honoring," "parent-honoring," "Sabbath-respecting" and so forth. If this is so, however, and if the new law does not abolish the old, then (1), (2), and (3) cannot but be false. That is, it is not true that (1) every just man must have at least all ten of the discrete properties listed by the Decalogue discretely; it is not true that (2) no man can be called just or God-fearing if he did not have at least these ten discrete listed by the Decalogue properties discretely; it is not true that (3) the ten discrete properties which compose the set of properties identified with "God-fearing" or "just" cannot in any way ever not be discrete. If this is true of "just," so too is it of , then properties need not be univocal and invariant features of reality. Implicit in Jesus' claim, as such, is that features do vary in accordance with their instantiation.

³⁴ What I mean by a "primitive" is an entity which does not in any way derive from some other entity, property, characteristic, quality, attribute, principle, or relation, an entity, in other words, which has no constituents other than itself.

“being the way they are.” But this would necessarily entail that properties cannot be really distinct from their instantiations. Thus, (p – 3), as such, is a necessary condition of (p – 2).

The second point can be made more quickly. One of the necessary conditions of (p – 1) properties are necessarily abstract entities is that (p – 2) properties are necessarily logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations. Were properties *in se* not necessary conditions of properties as they exist in concrete things, there would be no reason to posit the “Platonic menagerie.”

The thrust of my singling out these two points should be clear by now. The claim which I want to question in this article is precisely (p – 3). It is certainly true that if (p – 3) is true, that is, if properties are truly necessarily both invariant and primitive features of reality, then properties must indeed be (p – 2) logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations and (p – 1) abstract entities. And if properties are both logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations and abstract entities, then properties can neither “conflate” nor be identical to an entity. And if properties cannot conflate, nor be identical to an entity, then Plantinga must be right: the doctrine of divine simplicity is “an utter mistake,” a monumental mistake. But must we accept (p – 3)? Are properties necessarily unchanging features of reality?

Saint Anselm, Properties, and God

a. Saint Anselm and Plantinga’s Presuppositions

Saint Anselm’s response to this question would have been an unequivocal no. In *Monologion* XVI he indicates that properties can, and must in the case of man and God, vary in accordance with their instantiation [that is, $\sim (p - 3)$]. Man, he claims in that chapter, can be just, and God is unquestionably just, but this fact, he would have thought, does not entail that “justice” as it is instantiated in man and “justice” as it is instantiated in God are one and the same invariant property. Indeed, man’s “just” is nothing but his “possessing justice:” “For since a man cannot be justice but can have justice, a just man is not understood to be a man who is justice but to be a man who *has* justice.”³⁵ God’s “being just,” on the other hand, is nothing but his *being identical to justice*: “So since the Supreme Nature is not properly said to have justice but rather to be justice, then when [this Nature] is said to be just, it is properly understood to be [a Nature] which is justice rather than to be [a Nature] which has justice.”³⁶ Thus, were “justice” as it is instantiated in man and God to be one and the same property, man’s instantiating “justice” would

³⁵ Quoniam enim homo non potest esse iustitia, sed habere potest iustitiam, non intelligitur iustus homo existens iustitia, sed habens iustitiam. I shall be using Jasper Hopkins’s translation of the *Monologion*. Anselm of Canterbury, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises*, translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000).

³⁶ Quoniam igitur summa natura non proprie dicitur iusta quia habet iustitiam, sed existit iustitia: cum dicitur iusta, proprie intelligitur existens iustitia, non autem habens iustitiam. “So since the Supreme Nature is not properly said to have justice but rather to be justice, then when [this Nature] is said to be just, it is properly understood to be [a Nature] which is justice rather than to be [a Nature] which has justice.”

be his instantiating Godness. This would not just have sounded absurd to Saint Anselm. He would have thought it blasphemous.

As the argument indicates, the belief that properties are *invariant* features of reality is not the only one of Plantinga's beliefs concerning properties which Saint Anselm rejects. In *Monologion* XVI, as he had previously in *Monologion* VI, Saint Anselm flatly denies (p – 2) that properties are logically and ontologically prior to their instantiations. "Justice," he claims, might perhaps not be *quid sit summa natura* ["what God is"], but a property distinct from God. After all, one might think that "for whatever is just is just through justice."³⁷ This would, of course, entail that "[t]herefore, the Supreme Nature is just only through justice."³⁸ But this thought, Anselm quickly adds: "But this [view] is contrary to the truth which we have already seen: viz., that—whether good or great or existing—what [the Supreme Nature] is, it is completely through itself and not through something other [than itself]."³⁹ Thus, he concludes, justice cannot be a property distinct from God. That is, it cannot be a property which is logically and ontologically prior to God.

What is more, Anselm flatly denies (p – 1) properties are necessarily abstract entities. He has no trouble claiming that the property 'justice' is the concrete entity God, who is *iustitia*: "Therefore, if someone asks 'What is this Supreme Nature which is being investigated?' is there a truer answer than 'justice?'"⁴⁰ This should not be surprising, since Anselm finds both (p – 2) and (p – 3) abhorrent.

All of this indicates that Anselm would have considered (p – 4) properties are reality's primitives simply untenable. As his argument against (p – 2) indicates, denying Plantinga's presuppositions was crucial to Saint Anselm. He realized that if any of these presuppositions were true, then it could not be the case that God is simple. But divine simplicity was for Anselm, as it was for Boethius before him, a necessary requisite of God's being *Id quod nihil maius cogitari nequit*. If God were composite, he claims in *Monologion* XVII, He could not be the *Summum Ens*.

There is, of course, a problem lurking in the background here. It is all very nice, one might claim, that Saint Anselm's rejected Plantinga's presuppositions, and before he even formulated them. But Anselm's rejections of Plantinga's presuppositions give us very little reason for believing that the presuppositions themselves are untenable. All Saint Anselm's rejections show is that it is crucial to his metaphysics that God be thought of as simple. For it is divine simplicity itself that leads Saint Anselm to reject those presuppositions of Plantinga's which we discussed above. But divine simplicity is precisely what Plantinga questions. And one cannot very well counter those presuppositions of Plantinga's which inform his rejection of the

³⁷ Omne namque quod iustum est, per iustitiam iustum est.

³⁸ [I]psa summa natura non est iusta nisi per iustitiam.

³⁹ [C]ontrarium est veritati perspectae, quia bona vel magna, vel subsistens quod est, omnino per se est, non per aliud.

⁴⁰ Si quaeritur quid sit ipsa summa natura de qua agitur: quid verius respondetur, quam: iustitia?

doctrine of divine simplicity by responding that the presuppositions must be false since God is simple. It would be to put the cart before the horse: *petit principium*.

This would, of course, be a valid objection. And were Saint Anselm to have nothing more to say about Plantinga's presuppositions than that divine simplicity makes them unacceptable, one would not turn to him in order to question the presuppositions themselves. My contention, however, is that Saint Anselm has a great many more reasons for rejecting Plantinga's presuppositions than the fact that they make divine simplicity an impossibility: that they contradict God's "sovereignty and aseity."

In what follows I would like to spell out one of the reasons why Saint Anselm rejects one of Plantinga's presuppositions in *Monologion* XVI and XVII: the presupposition that (p – 3) properties are necessarily both invariant and primitive features of reality. The argument I shall articulate is just one of the many arguments against Plantinga's presuppositions which are embedded in these chapters. Indeed, it is just one of the many possible interpretations of these arguments. It is, however, a crucial one.

b. Why Saint Anselm Rejects Plantinga's Presuppositions

Let me begin by quickly defining a set of terms in order to make Saint Anselm's argument clear. This is necessary both because, as Jasper Hopkins points out, Anselm does not use a technical vocabulary which he clearly defines,⁴¹ and because some of Anselm's points may seem foreign to contemporary metaphysicians.

The first definition is, I believe, rather non-controversial. All it requires is that non-abstract things are qualified:

1. An "attribute" is a feature which can be predicated of that thing in which it is instantiated.⁴²

Anselm has a qualifier to this first definition.

2. An "attribute" can be predicated of the entire thing in which it is instantiated, or it can be predicated of only part that thing.⁴³

⁴¹ Cf. Jasper Hopkins, "On Translating Anselm's Complete Treatises," *Anselm of Canterbury, IV: Hermeneutical and Textual Problems in the Complete Treatises of Saint Anselm* (Toronto/New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1976), x: "In fact, if there is an irony about Anselm's writings, it is the irony that some of his ideas are unclear precisely because his language is too simple, and thus too imprecise, too empty of distinctions."

⁴² To make this first definition clear for Anselmians it is: an "attribute" is a feature which can be predicated of that thing in which it is instantiated under the categories of "substance," "quality," or "quantity." See Anselm's distinction at the beginning of *Monologion* XVI: "Sed fortasse cum dicitur iusta vel magna vel aliquid similius, ostenditur quid sit, set potius quails vel quanta sit."

⁴³ Again, to specify this point for Anselmians it is: an "attribute" which is predicated of that thing in which it is instantiated under the category of 'substance' qualifies the entire thing of which it is predicated; an "attribute" which

This qualifier is also, I believe, rather non-controversial. There is a clear difference between “attributes” like “window” and “pane.” The former of these attributes can be predicated of the entire rose window at the Cathedral of Chartres: it qualifies that entire window. The latter can, on the other hand, merely be predicated of one of the parts of that rose window: it only qualifies part of that window. For the sake of clarity, I think it is good to distinguish these two instances of attribution. Thus, we will call:

3. An “attribute” which is predicated of only a part of that in which it is instantiated a “property.”

We will, on the other hand, call:

4. An “attribute” which is predicated of the entire thing in which it is instantiated a “characteristic.”

Now that we have our definitions, we can lay out Anselm’s argument. It begins with a point which should again not be controversial.

5. There are attributes which can be predicated both of man and God.

The attribute Anselm uses to make this point is “justice.” “Justice,” he claims, can qualify both a man—there is such a thing as a just man “*homo habere potest iustitiam*”—and it must qualify God, we cannot not think of God as not just: “the supreme essence is [necessarily] alive, wise, powerful and all-powerful, true, just, happy, eternal ... and whatever is likewise better without qualification than not-whatever.”⁴⁴

There is, Saint Anselm thinks however, a difference between the ways these attributes can be predicated of man and God. That is:

6. Attributes are not predicated of both man and God in the same way.

Man can “have justice.” But when “justice” is predicated of man, it is not predicated of “all of man.” And this, Saint Anselm leads us to understand, is for at least two reasons. First, “justice” is not an attribute which is necessarily predicable of man. There are those men of whom “justice” cannot be predicated: there are those men who are not just. “Justice” must consequently be

is predicated of that thing in which it is instantiated under any category other than “substance,” does not qualify the entire thing of which it is predicated. See the end of *Monologion* XVII for Anselm’s distinction: “Cum enim aliquis homo dicatur et corpus et rationalis et homo, non uno modo vel consideratione haec tria dicetur. ... Illa vero summa essentiali nullo modo sic est aliquid, ut illud idem secundum alium modum aut secundum aliam considerationem non sit.”

⁴⁴ *Monologion* XV: Quare necesse est eam esse viventem, sapientem, potentem, et omnipotentem, veram, iustam, beatam, aeternam, et quidquid similiter absolute melius est quam non ipsum.

distinct from those attributes which man must instantiate in order to be a man: from *what essentially man is*.⁴⁵ What is more, “justice” can only be predicated of man after those attributes which a man must instantiate in order to be a man can be attributed to him. That is, man’s instantiation of those attributes which are necessary to him, must be logically and ontologically prior to his instantiation of “justice.” If this is so, however, then “justice” cannot qualify, or be predicated of, those attributes which man must instantiate in order to be a man. If these attributes too qualify man, and more fundamentally than “justice” can—that is, if they determine what a man *essentially is*—then “justice” cannot be predicated of “all of man.”

There is more. “Justice” cannot qualify the entire concrete thing which is a man any more than “being bodily,” and “being rational” can qualify the entire concrete thing which is a man: “For in one respect he is a body, in another rational; and neither of these constitutes the whole of what a man is.”⁴⁶ What this means, of course, is that if a man does have the attribute justice, then using the definitions above:

7. The attribute ‘justice’ in man is one of his “properties.”

Or more generally yet:

8. Man’s attributes are “properties.”

This is not so for God’s attributes. This is clear in the case of ‘justice,’ which Saint Anselm claims, cannot not qualify all of God: “By contrast, it is not at all the case that the Supreme Being is something in such a way that in some manner or respect it is not this thing.”⁴⁷ His point is well taken. What would it mean to claim that there is a sense in which God is not just? It would mean that His mercy is not just, that his omnipotence is not just, that his power is not just. This is not just a terrifying claim, it seems to be an absurd one. How can God truly be just if His power is not just, if His mercy is not just, if his omnipotence is not just? But if this is true, then, using the definitions above:

9. The attribute justice in God is one of his “characteristics.”

Or more generally yet:

10. God’s attributes are “characteristics.”

⁴⁵ “Justice,” to use Saint Anselm’s language, is an attribute which is not predicated of man under the category substance.

⁴⁶ *Monologion* XVII: Secundum aliud enim est corpus, et secundum aliud rationalis, et singulum horum non est totum hoc quod est homo.

⁴⁷ *Monologion* XVII: Illa vero summa essentia nullo modo sic est aliquid, ut illud idem secundum alium modum aut secundum aliam considerationem non sit.

That is: “Whatever [the Supreme Being] in some respect essentially is is the whole of what it is.”⁴⁸

Now we come to the interesting part. For if one concedes 5 through 9, then we get a very interesting conclusion:

11. There are some attributes that can be both a “property” and a “characteristic.”

Per se this seems to be an innocuous conclusion. All it would seem to imply is that attributes can be instantiated in different things in different ways, and this would seem to be perfectly compatible with Plantinga’s description of properties. Here is the problem, though. “Properties,” and “characteristics,” according to Anselm’s definitions, have different attributes. And these different attributes necessarily entail that one and the same attribute which instantiated as a “characteristic” in one being and a “property” in another is not an invariant attribute. That is, it entails that attributes can and must have variant features in those things in which they are instantiated.

This point is obvious if our definition of Anselm’s “characteristics” is correct.

12. For a given attribute to be a “characteristic” entails that it must be predicated of the entire thing in which it is instantiated.

But if 12 is true, then:

13. Any one of a being’s characteristics must be predicable of every other characteristic that being might have.

But if an attribute is predicable of something implies that it qualifies that thing, then 13 implies that:

14. Any one of a being’s characteristics must qualify every other characteristic that being might have.

We might rephrase 14 this way:

15. An attribute which is a thing’s “characteristic” is qualified by all other attributes which are “characteristics.”

This is clearly not true of those attributes which are “properties” of those things in which they are instantiated. For by definition,

16. A property can never qualify the entire thing of which it is predicated.

⁴⁸ *Monologion* XVII: Quidquid aliquo modo essentialiter est, hoc est totum quod ipsa [summa essential] est.

And 16 entails that:

17. An attribute which is a thing's "property" is not qualified by the other attributes instantiated in that thing.

But if this is all true, and if 11, then:

18. An attribute is not an invariant feature of reality.

If we put this point back into the context of our larger argument, we have:

19. $\sim (p - 3)$ properties are necessarily unchanging features of reality: features that do not vary in accordance with their instantiation.

Conclusion

There are many things to be said at this point, too many for a brief article. I shall, as such, limit myself to two points. The first, which in the present context is the most important one, is that if Saint Anselm is right, then Plantinga's objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity cannot simply be not valid objections. As we saw, Plantinga's presupposition that $(p - 3)$ properties are necessarily univocal and invariant features of reality is a necessary condition of those other presuppositions which inform his rejection of the doctrine of divine simplicity: the "substantial" and "monumental" difficulties he sees in the doctrine. Thus, if, as Saint Anselm points out, there are good reasons to reject $(p - 3)$, there must also be good reasons to reject Plantinga's objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

It may not be amiss to make a second point. It should not, I believe, be thought that it is fortuitous that Saint Anselm argued against the claim that properties are univocal and invariant features of reality. For although he certainly did not and could not have known contemporary property-based metaphysics, he was well acquainted with some of the problems that emerge from the Platonizing metaphysics that they share. Boethius had made these clear in that brief and cryptic work of his called the *Quomodo Substantiae*, or the *De Hebdomadibus*, with which Anselm seems to have been well acquainted, when he pointed out that the claim that "created things are substantially good"—which Boethius seemed also to think is convertible with the claim "the goodness of created things is identical with the goodness of God"—ineluctably leads to the claim that created things are God, which he claims is impious: *quod dictu nefas*.

Quod si ipsum esse in eis bonum est, non est dubium quin substantialia cum sint bona, primo sint bono similia ac per hoc ipsum bonum erunt; nihil enim illi praeter se ipsum simile est. Ex quo fit ut omnia quae sunt deus sint, quod dictu nefas est (*Quomodo Substantiae* 75–80).

It is this conclusion, as much as anything else, that Saint Anselm wants to avoid when he rejects Plantinga's (p – 3): properties are necessarily univocal and invariant features of reality.