Divine Simplicity

Abstract

Due to its lack of scriptural support and remote connection to the gospel proclamation, many Christians today are unfamiliar with the doctrine of Divine Simplicity. I will first establish that Simplicity, and by extension the existence of the Deity, is the most satisfying answer to the most foundational question in metaphysics and theology: “What is the cause for everything in existence?” Having demonstrated the centrality of Simplicity in the philosophical understanding of the Deity, I will enumerate the three various claims which bear the name “Divine Simplicity” (aspatiality, atemporality, and property simplicity) and demonstrate how they are all extensions of a singular underlying principle. Finally, having made the case for Simplicity, I will enumerate the apparent incompatibilities with other divine attributes in Classical Theism and orthodox Christian theology, including:

* Omniscience – On the principles that 1) metaphysical objects bear some reasonable semblance to their physical analogs (an ideal square still has four side of equal length meeting at equal angles) and 2) the physical mechanism for “the storage and transfer of information requires… a system of distinguishable states” ([*Information Storage and the Omniscience of God*, Johnson and Bailey 2003](http://www.dhbailey.com/papers/hollis-dhb-omnis.pdf)), it follows that for omniscience to be feasible there must exist a metaphysical mechanism for expressing information in distinct states. However, such distinct states are by definition a complexity incompatible with the proposition of simplicity. That is to say, information is finitely reducible, not merely physically but metaphysically as well. Per Johnson and Bailey, if God is “perfectly undifferentiated, completely homogenous, immaterial essence… then it follows that God can neither store not process any information, much less be ‘omniscient.’”
* The Triune Nature – While the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds affirm that the three Hypostases of the Trinity are ὁμοούσιος, thus permitting Simplicity, such nevertheless also claim that the Second Hypostasis was “begotten” by the First, and that the Third Hypostasis “proceeded” from the First (and possibly the Second as well). That is to say, the Second and Third Hypostases are logically and causally subsequent to the First, and therefore are not identifiable with the First Cause which predicates the doctrine of Simplicity (as will be established in the presentation). While a trinity is not a complex object *per se*, the specific formulation of the orthodox creeds violates Property Simplicity, whereby the Second and Third Hypostases inhere the properties of “Begotten” and “Proceeded” respectively, which are unidentifiable with and alien to the First Hypostasis. Thus, while it is logically possible to claim “God does not possess the property of Goodness but *is* Goodness,” it is not likewise possible to say “God does not possess the property of being Begotten but *is* Begotten.”
* The Incarnation – P1) Granting the inseparability of the Divine and human natures of Christ ascribed to him by the Chalcedonian Definition, the Resurrected and Ascended Christ remains fully Incarnate, including a physical body capable of touch and digestion. P2) As evidenced by objects with mass distorting spacetime, spacetime is known to be as physical phenomenon. P3) The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity that God is without spatial or temporal parts, that his eternality is one of atemporality. C) Insofar as the ascended Christ is “with the Father” “in Heaven,” he cannot demonstrate simultaneity with both the Father (Christ’s physical body being temporal, the Father being immaterial and therefore atemporal) and the physical universe in the interim between his Ascension and Return (as time, according to Einstein, is relative, and even if “Heaven” has its own metaphysical analogue to time it bears no frame of reference to any point in the physical universe).

More may be added as I develop the presentation. As of yet I have no satisfactory responses to such seeming incompatibilities with which to reconcile the more strongly supported Doctrine of Divine Simplicity with the aforementioned doctrines in Classical Theism and Orthodox Christianity. That work I leave to philosophers and theologians better than myself.

Intended Sources:

A Universe from Nothing by Lawrence M. Krauss

[Divine Simplicity](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/) at the Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy

[Information Storage and Divine Omniscience, Johnson and Bailey 2003](http://www.dhbailey.com/papers/hollis-dhb-omnis.pdf)

[reasonablefaith.org/divine-simplicity](http://www.reasonablefaith.org/divine-simplicity), William Lane Craig

Why Does the World Exist by Jim Holt