

Augustine and Divine Simplicity

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The doctrine of divine simplicity in its denial of any real ontological distinction between God's substance and His attributes commanded a special place within classical theism, finding a forceful expression within Augustine's metaphysic.¹ However, the simplicity of God is a relatively neglected doctrine within current metaphysical and theistic considerations. This is somewhat strange considering the profound implications it has for theistic matters. Its tenets are inextricably linked to such theistic concerns as immutability, aseity, sovereignty, divine volition and necessity.² As such, it is well worth our effort to devote careful attention to the Augustinian conception of God's simpleness,³ confronting head-on its seemingly counter-intuitive assertion that there is not any actual distinction between divine substance and its qualities. We will want to first expound the relevant texts to Augustine's teaching on divine simplicity. After its main features have been identified, our analysis will measure Augustine's doctrine against some of the more serious contemporary objections.

We initiate our exposition by asking: What is Augustine's notion of divine simplicity? Augustine's doctrine rallies around the claim that God is what He *has* (*hoc est quod habet*).⁴ He remarks, "What is meant by 'simple' is that its [the Godhead] being is identical with its attributes, . . ." (CD XI.10). To gain a fuller appreciation of this pithy formula, it is necessary for us to consider its wider context.

Within *De civitate Dei*, Augustine begins the tenth chapter of Book XI by stating, "There is then one sole Good, which is simple, and therefore unchangeable; and that is God. By this Good all good things were created; but they are not simple, and for that reason are changeable." We notice here that Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity bears a close relationship to the immutable character of God. Indeed, God's simplicity constitutes the ground for His "changeless" disposition. This is because a simple being "cannot lose any attribute it possesses" (CD XI.10). Created entities, on the other hand, "may be deprived of what they have, and adopt other qualities and different attributes" (CD XI.10). It remains for us to investigate why such a scenario holds true. But for now, it is enough to

point out that for Augustine change, by definition, involves the addition or subtraction, if you will, of some quality or characteristic identified with or residing within a particular being.⁵ However, since this behaviour is inadmissible within a simple being, and since God is in fact simple, it follows that divine existence cannot undergo change.⁶

While it is true that Augustine's definition of simplicity excludes accidents, namely, that which can be increased or decreased (T V.4), this fact alone does not fully encompass its meaning. After citing several examples where accidental change does occur, Augustine mentions the possibility of certain things not being able to lose their qualities, namely, incorruptible bodies. Nevertheless, such existence cannot be considered simple. Augustine explains why this must be the case, "It follows that although incorruptibility is a quality inseparable from an incorruptible body, the substance in virtue of which it is called a body is other than the quality from which it derives the epithet incorruptible. And so even in this case, *being* and *attribute* are not the same" (CD XI.10). Even beings that are granted an imperishable status, are marked by natures that can be clearly distinguished from the qualities predicated of them. As indicated above, though, no such distinction exists within deity because God's attributes are identical to His being. Simplicity, then, rather than merely precluding the possibility of loss, excludes any ontological composition within the Godhead.

Augustine further illustrates the above point by referring to the human soul. He writes, "the soul itself, even though it may be always wise—as it will be, when it is set free from all eternity—will be wise through participation in the changeless Wisdom, which is other than itself" (CD XI.10). It is quite possible, then, to be without accidents, yet not be regarded as simple. By contrast, "the epithet 'simple' applies to things which are in the fullest and truest sense divine, because in them there is no difference between substance and quality, and their divinity, wisdom and blessedness is not acquired by participation in that of others" (CD XI.10). So, it is rather apparent that Augustine has in mind more than the fact that a simple entity is without accident, although such a condition is necessary for simplicity. Augustine underscores the fact that composition is incompatible with divine existence.

Already, it is evident that Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity plays an important role in his concept of God. The lack of composition in God serves to clearly demarcate divine Being from all other existing realities. Augustine comments:

How much more so, then, is this true of that unchangeable and eternal substance, incomparably more simple than the human soul. For in the

human soul to be is not the same as to be strong, or prudent, or just, or temperate, for there can be a soul without any of these virtues. But for God to be is the same as to be strong, or to be just, or to be wise, and to be whatever else you may say of that simple multiplicity, or that multiple simplicity, whereby His substance is signified (T VI.4)⁷

The simpleness of God bespeaks a transcendent Being that can in no way be identified with creaturely existence. The doctrine denotes a Being that is infinitely superior in that it lacks the limitations of composed entities. In short, it functions as an antidote to various forms of pantheism.

Yet, there are possible complications with applying the notion of simplicity to the Godhead. How is such a doctrine to be maintained in the face of God's triune character? Notwithstanding the distinction of three persons within the Trinity, Augustine maintains that God is simple. He asserts, "This Trinity is one God; the fact that it is a Trinity does not mean that it is not simple" (CD XI.10). In an effort to harmonize the ostensible conflict between multiplicity and simplicity within the Trinitarian conception of God, Augustine makes some distinctions. First, the created (*creata*) or made (*facta*) is to be differentiated from what is begotten (*genita*). Whereas a finite, created being exhibits composition, "what is begotten by the simple Good is itself equally simple, identical in nature with its begetter: and these two, the begetter and the begotten, we call the Father and the Son; and these two, with their Spirit, are one God" (CD XI.10).

Augustine continues to argue that "the Spirit is other than the Father and the Son, since he is not the Father or the Son; but I said 'other,' not 'another thing,' because this Good also is equally simple, changeless, and co-eternal" (CD XI.10). Each person of the Trinity does not possess a unique substance or essence. Essentially, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same. Yet, on another level, a distinction between the persons of the Trinity can be made. The Father is "other" (*alius*) than the Son in one sense, but He is not a different "something" (*aliquid*), substance or being. How, then, are the members of the Trinity "other" or distinct from each other? Augustine posits that divine simplicity involves God *being* what It *has*, "apart from the relation in which each person is said to stand to each other. For the Father of course has the Son; and yet he himself is not the Son; and the Son has the Father; and yet he himself is not the Father. But when each is regarded in himself, not in relation to the other, his being is identical with his attributes" (CD XI.10).

In the above citations, Augustine distinguishes between relative and absolute (nonrelative) predications about God. A relative predication signifies the *relation* evident among the persons of the Trinity.⁸ And as we will have occasion to comment on at greater length below, this relative

predication also depicts the *relation* of God to creatures. On the other hand, in that divine existence does not possess any accidents, nonrelative predications refer to God's essence or being. Only when each member of the Godhead is considered "in himself,"⁹ that is, in terms of His *being* or essence, is He to be thought of as identical with His attributes. However, with respect to any of the divine persons' *relation* to the other immutable, eternal members of the Trinity, it is not a matter of that respective person *being* what it *has*. In this case, a distinction is warranted. As such, the simplicity of God is left intact as it pertains to His *essence*, and not His eternal and unchangeable *relations*.

If the doctrine of divine simplicity tests Augustine's Trinitarian views, it also complicates his outlook on the divine ideas. For Augustine assigns a plurality of ideas (*rationes*) to the divine mind. Nevertheless, such a state of affairs is seen to be as compatible with God's simpleness as are His manifold properties. For the ideas are themselves thought to be identical with God's essence. That is, Augustine identifies the ideas with wisdom. He maintains that in Scripture "the Spirit of Wisdom is 'multiple', in that it has qualities in itself; but the Spirit's being is identical with its qualities, and all those qualities are one Person. For there are not many wisdoms, but one Wisdom, the storehouse, we may say, of things intelligible, of the riches which are infinite and yet confined to that Wisdom" (CD XI.10).¹⁰

In order to achieve an adequate understanding of how Augustine perceives God being identified with His attributes, a further distinction must be elucidated. That is, the doctrine of simplicity concerns itself not with our speech (*dictio*) or thought (*cogitatio*) about God, but rather with the being (*esse*) of God. We find Augustine commenting, "the supereminent excellence of the divinity transcends all the limits of our wonted manner of speaking. For what is thought of God is truer than what is said, and His being truer than what is thought" (T VII.4). In applying this distinction to deity, it can be seen that a multiplicity of predicates are attributed to God by our *speech*, but with respect to God's *being*, they are indistinguishable. Augustine states:

But 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, for He is great not by bulk, but by power. Similarly, 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 Himself (T VI.7).

Later on within *De Trinitate*, Augustine dismisses the notion that goodness and justice are different from each other *in the nature* of God (T XV.5). So, even though many characteristics are *said* of God, in actual fact they *are* identical to one another within God's essence.

Now, within the above perspective, Augustine does not at all mean to imply that the terms denominated of God are synonymous. It is true that Augustine does attempt to reduce the numerous attributes of God to a smaller number (T XV.5). As Roland Teske explains, what Augustine "tries to do is to argue that, since no one can be happy without being just and good and a spirit, in saying 'happy' one is implicitly saying all the rest. His presupposition is that God is not merely spoken of in many terms (*multipliciter dicitur*), but is thought of in many senses (*multipliciter cogitatur*) because the terms have different meanings."¹¹ Within human cognition, the various predicates of God do indeed convey distinct meanings. Yet, as Augustine states, "one and the same thing [reality] is, therefore, referred to, whether God is called immortal, or incorruptible, or unchangeable" (T XV.5). While a multitude of thoughts and terms can be applied to divine existence, they refer to one and the same *reality*.¹²

Thus far, we have identified what Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity signifies and entails. We must now ask: What is the reason for maintaining that God is in fact simple? It is one thing to identify a philosophic position, and quite another to prove its necessity. Augustine's primary argument for his thesis is witnessed within Book Five, Chapter Ten, of *De Trinitate*. There is a definite problem with viewing the ultimate Being's essence as distinct from those properties ascribed to Him. For instance, the quality "greatness" is quite distinct from a "great house." "But true greatness is that by which not only the great house and any great mountain is great, but also that by which everything else that is called great is great. Thus, the greatness itself is one thing, and those that are called great from it are another thing" (T V.10). Here Augustine appeals to the Platonic doctrine of participation. Unparticipated "greatness" is not delimited by those entities that partake in its reality. "Greatness" considered *in itself* stands in an absolute, supreme and perfect way, not knowing of limitation as in the creaturely realm. As Augustine declares, "Certainly, this greatness is primarily and in a much higher degree, great, than the things which are great by a participation in it" (T V.10).

But, God cannot participate in "greatness," thereby displaying composition. Augustine reasons, "God is not great by a greatness, which is not that which He Himself is, so that God becomes as it were a sharer in it when He is great. For in that case the greatness would be greater than God, but there cannot be anything greater than God; therefore, He is great

by that greatness which is identical with Himself" (T V.10). Thus, for God *to be is to be great*. "He is great by Himself being great, for He Himself is His own greatness" (T V.10). The same would hold true for God's other attributes. So, if God were not identical to His attributes, He would stand in a subordinate relation to some other set of principles. But, God, by definition, is the ultimate and absolute Being. Hence, God's essence must be considered equivalent to what is predicated of Him. And, of course, this is precisely what the doctrine of divine simplicity gives articulation to.¹³

From the above, it should be somewhat apparent that the necessary horizon for Augustine's portrayal of divine simplicity is the way of remotion (*via negativa*). The illimitable abyss separating primary Being from the created order dictates a spirit of humility when delineating a doctrine that concerns the Transcendent.¹⁴ Augustine not only recommends, but employs this methodological approach.¹⁵ For when the human soul has tried to grasp God, it becomes aware of how much it does not know about Him (*cuius nulla scientia est in anima, nisi scire quomodo eum nesciat*).¹⁶ Perhaps no occasion merits this disposition more than the consideration of God's utter simplicity. Very clearly, any expectation of conceptualizing the doctrine of divine simplicity, which involves the *denial* of composition, should be tempered by the recognition of the limitations of finite comprehension. The consequence of the chasm separating the transobjective from the creaturely realm, if nothing else, should provide a caveat for our speculation on God's simpleness. It should cause us to realize that human categories of thought operate in a radically different way from that of divinity. It is quite understandable, then, that properties are not denominated of God in the same way as with finite creatures. They are not predicated of God and creation univocally, but rather analogically.¹⁷

Given the professed difficulty with the subject matter, it is not surprising that Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity has met with some rather severe criticism over the years. Richard La Croix has devoted an entire study to its alleged unintelligibility and incoherence.¹⁸ La Croix is dissatisfied with Augustine's argument with respect to God's simpleness on two separate counts. First, within a certain interpretive scheme, namely, where God is viewed as not having any contingent properties, Augustine's position would appear contradictory. Second, Augustine's view is thought to be deficient in that it is incapable of supplying a criterion for distinguishing between relative and nonrelative (absolute) properties within God. That is, in Augustine there is not any adequate conceptual machinery to prevent relative or contingent properties from being ascribed to divine existence. Let us examine in

greater detail La Croix's rationale for positing such claims in order to determine whether there is merit to his objections or whether Augustine is to be exonerated.

Within his discussion, La Croix uses the term "property" in a broad manner. A "property" is viewed as anything that is predicated of a subject, corresponding to the ten Aristotelian predicaments. This would not only include such characteristics as "being a man" or "being a horse," but "being large" or "being yellow" or "being a father" as well.¹⁹ A "contingent" property is one that either begins or ceases to possess some quality. In other words, it is to be equated with what Augustine understands as "accidents." For example, the property of being yellow is a contingent property of a yellow book since this property can be forfeited or gained. A "necessary" property, by contrast, is one that excludes any contingent element.²⁰ In resuming the illustration, the property of being extended in space and time is a necessary property of a yellow book. A yellow book cannot be a book unless it involves spatial and temporal categories.

La Croix applies this understanding of "property" to Augustine's notion of divine simplicity. God is considered simple if and only if He does not possess any contingent property. This is thought to follow from the fact that in Augustine a nature is simple in that it cannot lose any of its properties (CD XI.10). But, according to La Croix this violates Augustine's teaching elsewhere. Within Book Five, Chapter Sixteen, of *De Trinitate*, La Croix believes that Augustine teaches "that there was a time at which God began to possess the property of being the Lord of the people of Israel for if God had this property from eternity then we would be compelled to admit that the people of Israel have existed from eternity."²¹ God, then, is seen to have a contingent property. Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity, therefore, appears to be compromised.

Even with an alternate reading of the text, where contingent properties are reflected in a simple, primary Being, Augustine would still have, according to La Croix, the task of showing "the difference between the kind of properties that are contingent for God and the kind of properties that are contingent for every other thing."²² La Croix sees Augustine attempting to come to terms with this predicament in describing the property of being the Lord of the people of Israel as *relative*. At this level, God does not undergo change within His nature and thereby imperil His simplicity. For instance, an amount of "money" can be *relative* to the contingent property of being a price for something. While a particular price may fluctuate, thereby altering how the amount of "money" *relates* to it, the "money" does not gain or lose some further contingent property. In like fashion, God's essence does not change when

He begins to be *related* to the contingent property of being Lord over the people of Israel.²³ With this in mind, the condition for God being simple is that He does not have any nonrelative contingent properties. In other words, God's absolute nature cannot be affected by the contingent realm.

But, the question remains as to what would make a property *contingent* as opposed to *necessary*. While La Croix does not believe that Augustine provides an explicit formulation for how the difference between relative and nonrelative properties obtains, he is willing to offer one on Augustine's behalf. What La Croix comes up with is that a property is relative to some entity if and only if it is not identical to that being which it refers to. Or alternatively, "if the predicate of a statement refers to a being not identical to the subject of the statement then the property ascribed in that predicate is a relative property."²⁴ But for La Croix, both statements are defective. The formulation that is suggested first is countered by the statement "The entity worshiped by Augustine is omniscient." In this proposition, the property of being omniscient becomes relative because it does refer to a being not identical to the entity worshiped by Augustine. But within the statement "God is omniscient," the property of being omniscient is nonrelative. A contradiction arises, then, in that the property of being omniscient is both relative and nonrelative.

The second formulation is equally problematic. It does remedy the problem with the first proposal in that the property of being omniscient is now nonrelative for both God and the entity worshiped by Augustine. This is because the predicate "omniscient" refers neither to an entity not identical to God, nor to a being not identical to what Augustine worships. But in the statement "God has the property I am thinking of," "the property I am thinking of" becomes a relative property in La Croix's second proposal. But, if the property that I am thinking of is "omniscience," the property of being omniscient, then, will be relative. And when conjoined with the sentence "God is omniscient," the property of being omniscient is both relative and nonrelative, and thus contradictory.²⁵

Now, what are we to make of La Croix's assessment of Augustine's doctrine of simplicity? Can the Augustinian orientation be salvaged? In response, it seems that the two objections that La Croix has levelled against Augustine can be avoided. First, with respect to the criticism that Augustine at times makes no allowance for contingent properties within God, it is crucial to note that La Croix erroneously identifies Augustine's "accidents" with "contingent" properties.²⁶ As noted above within our exposition of Augustine's conception of divine simplicity, it is true that accidents are not in God. But, it is quite another matter to suggest the

possibility that for Augustine “contingent” properties are not applicable to the divine sphere.

Even as La Croix has suggested, within what he considers to be one of the possible readings of Augustine, there are, in fact, predicates that can be attributed to God at some time, and not at other times (T V.16). Statements about God that begin to be true or cease to be true of God, though, do not pertain to the divine essence. We recall here the distinction made earlier between speech (*dictio*) and being (*esse*). The property of being Lord over the people of Israel does indeed name a contingent property of God, at least in the wider sense of the term as employed by La Croix. But this statement (*dictio*) about God does not alter the being (*esse*) of God. As Teske comments, “It is one thing for there to be change in the truth value of a statement about God; it is quite another thing for there to be change in God.”²⁷

In an analogous manner to the *relations* of the Trinity as described above, God is said to be Creator and Lord *relatively*, or according to *relation*. The supreme Being does not change in His relationship with the world, even though there are real changes in God’s relation with the world. It is just that when there is change, it is in the creature, not God. For example, when a person moves from one side of a tree to the other, the tree does not undergo change; the person changes in *relation* to the tree. So it is with God’s dealings with the finite, temporal realm of creation. There most certainly is a contingent element within the point of contact between God and creation. And, for Augustine, there is no problem in viewing such a relationship in terms of “contingent” properties, since the fluctuation is on the side of the creature, and not of God’s being or essence. Therefore, the possibility for interpreting Augustine as denying “contingent” properties within God, should be entirely dismissed.

As for La Croix’s concern whether a criterion for distinguishing relative and nonrelative properties of God can be furnished or not, Teske argues that Augustine’s portrayal of God’s simplicity does meet the challenge. Teske makes the point that there are statements (*dictiones*) that are true of God *in time* (T V.16). Such statements, though, denote accidents in creatures rather than in God. A new state of affairs with respect to how God is said to *relate* to creatures is made possible on the basis of accidents residing within finite beings. As with our above discussion of change, the temporal element is on the side of the created order. It is the contingent aspect of God’s creation that becomes the condition of truth. Any change that is required for the truth of a statement with respect to God must occur in the creature.²⁸

With the above in mind, Teske is able to construct a rule for

distinguishing relative and nonrelative properties of God. In the case of God, for a property to be relative, it would require as a condition of truth some being other than God.²⁹ And conversely, a property of God is nonrelative “if neither ‘God is P’ nor ‘God is not P’ requires as a condition of its truth a being other than God and if neither ‘God is P’ nor ‘God is not P’ would require any being other than God, were either ‘God is P’ or ‘God is not P’ true.”³⁰ Now, in returning to the sentences that La Croix cited as counter examples to his formulations, we discover that they fit in quite nicely with what Teske has to offer. If we were to assume an eternal, immutable and transtemporal God, as classical theism does, the statement “God is omniscient” does not begin to be true of God *in time*. Clearly, then, it is of a nonrelative sort.

But if we were to take the statement “God has the property I am thinking of,” we would recognize a statement that has its truth condition met in the temporal sphere of one’s subjective experience. The truth conditions involved are that I exist, that I am thinking, that I am thinking of a property and that I am thinking of a property of God. Obviously, then, the statement requires a set of conditions that must be met at a level other than that of the divine. Previous to my coming into existence, the veracity of the statement could not be affirmed. As Teske observes, “it is a proposition that begins to be true of God in time.”³¹ The change that occurred to make the sentence true was dependent on my finite status, and not on any alteration on the part of God.

What Teske has proposed is a viable response to La Croix’s critique of Augustine’s notion of divine simplicity. It does in fact make sense to distinguish between relative and absolute properties within God. Represented within Augustine’s thought is a defensible method for contrasting relative and nonrelative properties. The net result is a means for preserving the simple, uncomposed character of God’s existence against the constantly shifting and mutating constitution of finite realities. Within the divine essence, there is no composition; there is no gain or loss of attribute. The variance in God’s contingent properties is due to the transient nature of the sensible realm, and not to any “essential” change in God. Since God is immutable, there is no basis to deny His simplicity. There is every reason, though, to affirm with Augustine the doctrine of *hoc est quod habet* (“God is what He has”).

- 1 For the Anselmic and Thomistic formulations, consult *Monologion* XVI–XVII; *Proslogion* XVIII; *Summa theologiae* Ia.3; and *Summa contra gentiles* I.18.
- 2 See, e.g., William E. Mann, “Simplicity and Immutability in God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983): 267–76; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 78, 1981: 429–58; “Absolute Simplicity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2, 1985: 353–82; Robert M. Adams, “Has It Been Proved that All Existence Is Contingent?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8,

- 1971: 284–91; and “Divine Necessity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 80, 1983: 741–752.
- 3 It is rather crucial that we qualify just how the term “simplicity” is employed throughout our study. As David B. Burrell states, “simpleness does not name a characteristic of God, but a formal feature of God as ‘beginning and end of all things.’ It is a shorthand term for saying that God lacks composition of any kind;” *Aquinas: God and Action*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, 18. Simplicity, then, is the negation of composition. It is a doctrine that comes to us through apophatic intellection, by way of remotio (the *via negativa*). The simpleness of God denotes an existence that is pure and unalloyed. We should also note, that for Augustine, divine simplicity mainly rises out of philosophic rather than revelational convictions. It is a doctrine drawn not so much from theology as from necessary ontological conclusions.
 - 4 *De Civitate Dei* XI.10. Translations from this text are taken from *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, London: Penguin Books, 1984. References to the *De Civitate Dei* appear within our study under the abbreviation “CD.”
 - 5 *De Trinitate* V.2, 4. Throughout our study, references to Augustine’s *De Trinitate* are abbreviated with a “T.” We will utilize the translation of Stephen McKenna, *The Trinity, The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 45, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963.
 - 6 This would include both the *fact* of change, as well as the *possibility* for change. Moreover, the verb form of the term “change” possesses the passive sense within Latin, namely, “to be changed” (*mutari*). This is to indicate that God cannot be acted upon or modified by anything else. For an insightful elaboration of Augustine’s views on God’s immutability, see Roland J. Teske, “Divine Immutability in Saint Augustine,” *The Modern Schoolman* 63 (1986): 233–49.
 - 7 Cf. *De Trinitate* V.2; VII.5; XV.13.
 - 8 It is important to note that for Augustine, even though nothing in God is said to be according to accident, this does not mean that everything that is said of Him refers to His substance or essence. The persons of the Trinity, each equally and fully being identified with the eternal and immutable essence, are in no way to be understood according to accident. But, as will be explained below, the persons of the Trinity, with respect to each other, are spoken of according to *relation*, not according to *essence* (T V.5).
 - 9 Within *De Trinitate*, Augustine relates this point to the issue of “begotten” versus “unbegotten.” Whereas the “begotten” implies a relationship to something else, the “unbegotten does not express a relationship, but refers to him [the Son (unbegotten = Father)] as he is in himself” (T V.6).
 - 10 For a fuller discussion on the relationship between the divine ideas and the doctrine of divine simplicity, see Theodore Kondoleon, “Divine Exemplarism in Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 1(1970): 181–95.
 - 11 Roland J. Teske, “Properties of God and the Predicaments in *De Trinitate* V,” *The Modern Schoolman* 59 (1981): 4–5.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, 5.
 - 13 It is worth noting that this sort of argument is not original with Augustine. Plotinus, e.g., employed its form within the context of his discussion on absolute freedom. Rather than conforming to some higher, more exalted, principle, the One’s nature is due to Himself. Absolute Being cannot be subject to its nature as it is absurd to look for a cause of that which is First (*Ennead* VI.8.20; cf. VI.8.9; V.3.17; V.42; VI.7.38). Also, within *De Civitate Dei* VIII.6, Augustine credits the “Platonists” for having arrived at the truth of God’s simplicity.
 - 14 Echoes of this sentiment are felt in Aquinas when he remarks, “Now in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of remotio. For by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches.

- Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing *what it is*. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing *what it is not*" (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I.14.2). With respect to the issue of divine simplicity, Aquinas comments, "Now the forms of things God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way" (*Ibid.*, I.32.2).
- 15 For a thematic treatment of Augustine's negative theology, see Vladimir Lossky, "Elements of 'Negative Theology' in the Thought of St. Augustine," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21 (1977): 67–75.
 - 16 *De ordine* II.16. Cf. In *Joannis evangelium tractatus* 106.17.4. As with Augustine, Aquinas maintains that "reason can know that a simple form is, even though it cannot attain to understanding *what it is*" (*Summa theologiae* Ia.12.12).
 - 17 For some very good discussions on analogical predication with respect to theological language see, W. Norris Clarke, "Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language About God: A Reply to Kai Nielsen," *The Thomist* 40 (1976): 61–95; Ralph M. McInerney, "Can God Be Named by Us? Prolegomena to Thomistic Philosophy of Religion," *Review of Metaphysics* 32 (1979): 53–73; Eric L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949; Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963; Niels C. Nielsen, Jr. "Analogy and the Knowledge of God: An Ecumenical Appraisal," *Rice University Studies* 60 (1974): 21–102; Tobias Chapman, "Analogy," *The Thomist* 39 (1975): 127–41; and David B. Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University, 1973).
 - 18 Richard R. La Croix, "Augustine on the Simplicity of God," *The New Scholasticism* 51 (1977): 453–69. For a review of his position and a rebuttal, see William J. Wainwright, "Augustine on God's Simplicity: A Reply," *The New Scholasticism* 53 (1979): 118–23; and La Croix, "Wainwright, Augustine and God's Simplicity: A Final Word," *The New Scholasticism* 53 (1979): 124–27.
 - 19 Teske, "Properties of God and the Predicaments in *De Trinitate* V," 5–6.
 - 20 La Croix, "Augustine on the Simplicity of God," 455–56.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, 456.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 460.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 460–62.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, 466.
 - 25 Teske, "Properties of God and the Predicaments in *De Trinitate* V," 17.
 - 26 Roland J. Teske observes that La Croix's translation of *De Civitate Dei* XI.10 inappropriately inserts the term "properties" which is not in accord with the original Latin. Teske goes on to say, "since properties occur in statements, his translation would seem to imply that no statement of the form, 'God is P,' could be a contingent statement—despite the fact that Augustine does argue that some predicates begin to be true of God in time that were not previously true of God." *Ibid.*, 6.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 8. Elsewhere, Teske writes, "it is important to distinguish two sorts of change. There is the first sort of change in which something is intrinsically modified; there is another sort of change by extrinsic denomination where something new is said of something without that thing being intrinsically changed. Divine immutability does not mean that we cannot truly say new things about God. That something new begins to be truly said of God need not entail a change in God's substance, since the newness can be on the part of some creature with respect to which God is said to begin to be something. Teske, "Divine Immutability in Saint Augustine," 235.
 - 28 Teske, "Properties of God and the Predicaments in *De Trinitate* V," 13–14.
 - 29 As Teske indicates, such a formulation is limited to the issue of "relations" as it pertains to finite creatures, and not to the "relative" predicates of God that are eternally true for the persons of the Trinity. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, 16.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, 18.