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Brian Leftow

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# DIVINE SIMPLICITY

Brian Leftow

Augustine, Aquinas and many other medievals held the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS)—that God has no parts of any sort. Augustine took this to imply that for any non-relational attribute  $F$ , if God is  $F$ ,  $\text{God} = F\text{ness}$ . This can seem to create three problems. I set them out. Having done so, I show that Augustine's DDS is set within a view of attributes now unfamiliar to us. When we bring this into the picture, it turns out that two of the problems do not really arise and the third is not really problematic. I then suggest that my rescue of Augustine may rescue other prominent friends of DDS as well.

## *Divine Simplicity*

Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and a host of lesser medieval lights held the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS)—that God has no parts of any sort.<sup>1</sup> Parts of this doctrine follow from standard Western-theist commitments. It's standard that God is not material. If He is not, God has no material parts. It's standard that God is not extended either spatially or temporally.<sup>2</sup> If He is not, God has no spatial or temporal parts. But other parts of DDS can seem anything but standard. Augustine writes that God is called simple because "what He has, He is"<sup>3</sup> and goes on to explain that in simple beings "it is not the case that quality is one thing, substance another, nor are they divine or wise or blessed by participating in other things."<sup>4</sup>

God is wise. So God has wisdom. But for Augustine, God does not "participate in" a wisdom distinct from Himself. Instead, the wisdom He has is something He is—something with which He is identical. For Augustine, then, DDS entails that  $\text{God} = \text{wisdom}$ , and more generally that

1. for all  $F$ , if God is  $F$  and  $F\text{ness}$  is not a relation,  $\text{God} = F\text{ness}$ .<sup>5</sup>

(1) appears to create three problems. I now set them out. Having done so, I show that Augustine's DDS is set within a view of attributes now unfamiliar to us. When we bring this into the picture, it turns out that two do not really arise and the third is not really problematic. I then suggest that my rescue of Augustine may rescue other prominent friends of DDS as well.

## *The Problems*

Augustine notes an implication of (1):

God is truly called great, good, wise . . . but His greatness and wisdom are identical . . . and His goodness is identical to His wisdom and greatness.<sup>6</sup>



One might read this text as about only God's cases of properties—"His greatness," etc.<sup>7</sup> But Augustine is a Platonist. For Platonists, if A is F, the Fness A has is just Fness itself—"participation" links all particulars which are F to the same thing. So what Augustine sees is that if (1) is true, then for all F and G, if God is F, God is G, and F- and Gness are not relations, then God = Fness, God = Gness, and so Fness = Gness. Plantinga raises the obvious worry here, that

If God is identical with each of his properties . . . God has but one property. (Yet) God has both power and mercifulness . . . neither of which is identical with the other.<sup>8</sup>

He also suggests that

If God is identical with each of his properties, then since each of his properties is a property, he is a property. . . . If God is a property, then he isn't a person but a mere abstract object. . . . So . . . the simplicity doctrine seems an utter mistake.<sup>9</sup>

Our third problem is that if (1) is true, then if God is wise, God = wisdom, and so wisdom is wise. Wisdom seems something abstract. The wise are all persons, and so concrete. So "wisdom is wise" seems a sort of category mistake. Yet far from fleeing this, Augustine embraces it:

Just as it is absurd to say that whiteness is not white, it is absurd to say that wisdom is not wise . . . true wisdom both is wise and is wise of itself.<sup>10</sup>

I shortly argue that once one factors in Augustine's approach to attributes, that wisdom is wise is not in fact counterintuitive, and Augustine is right to accept it.

#### *Augustine on Forms*

Whoever is wise has wisdom. For Augustine, such abstract terms as "wisdom" denote the things Plato called Forms.<sup>11</sup> So when Augustine asserts that God "is" the wisdom He "has," he identifies God with a Form—or, put more carefully, he asserts that a term otherwise best taken to refer to a Form refers in fact to God. Thus when Plantinga claims that if God is identical with a property, He is not a person, Augustine is free to agree. For his DDS does not entail that God is identical with a property: Forms are not properties. Non-haecceity properties are things possibly predicated of many. For Platonism, what is predicated of all dogs is not a Form, The Dog, but participation in it. Thus for a Platonist, a non-haecceity property is a relation to a Form: doghood is participation in The Dog. Augustine does not identify God with relations to Forms. Of course, that Augustine's DDS deals in Forms may seem not to help much against Plantinga if Forms are as abstract as properties. But Plantinga takes it without argument that if one identifies God and something abstract, the result is something abstract. It might instead be to eliminate the abstract entity, leaving God as

He was. Augustine identifies God with Forms to eliminate the Forms and have God take over their role in the theory of attributes. A difference between properties as we conceive them and Forms as Augustine conceived them makes God a good candidate for this role.

Augustine's thinking about Forms picks up a strand of Platonism we tend to ignore. Augustine writes that

when I recall some arch, turned beautifully . . . which . . . I saw at Carthage . . . I behold in my mind yet another thing, according to which that work of art pleases me, and whence also, if it displeased me, I should correct it. So we judge of those particular things according to that, and discern that form by the rational mind's intuition . . . grasping such forms by simple intelligence. . . . We behold then, by the sight of the mind . . . the form according to which we are, and according to which we do anything by true and right reason.<sup>12</sup>

We use our grasp of Forms to appraise concrete things, for Augustine. For Augustine, following one strand in Plato<sup>13</sup>, Forms are standards for evaluating concreta. Implicit in the example is that things may conform to standards to varying degrees. (We are displeased insofar as a work of art fails to conform to the relevant standard, and we find ourselves displeased with artworks to varying degrees.) Now we might think that Forms can be standards only in obviously normative contexts: matters of beauty and of what is or is not done "by true and right reason." But Augustine in the same breath treats as a standard "the form according to which we are." Again, Augustine writes that

we do not gather a generic or specific knowledge of the human mind by means of resemblance, by seeing many minds. . . . Rather, we gaze upon indestructible truth, from which to define perfectly, as far as we can, not of what sort is the mind of any one particular man, but of what sort it ought to be upon the eternal plan.<sup>14</sup>

For Platonists, we predicate membership in kinds (genera and species) of particular things in light of our grasp of Forms. To grasp a Form, and so be able to "see" to what kind a thing belongs, is to "see" what is required to belong to the kind, i.e., what something of that kind "ought to be." For Augustine, then, even in cases not involving obvious evaluations, Forms are in fact standards. In his eyes, to be an F is *inter alia* to measure up well enough to the standard for Fs to count as F—as beautiful, morally good or human.

So when Augustine identifies God with Forms, he identifies God with a set of standards. For Augustine, the claim that God = Fness, where F is an attribute creatures can also bear, really means that God is identical with the *standard* for Fness:

We may not say that God has measure. . . . Yet He is not without measure by whom measure is given to all things . . . we must not say that God has measure, as if it were imposed upon him from elsewhere. But if we call him the supreme measure, we perhaps say something

significant.<sup>15</sup> How can God be identified with measure (and) number? . . . in the sense that measure places a limit on everything (and) number gives everything form. . . . God is identified with these. . . . He limits everything, forms everything. . . . [He is] beyond all that can be measured . . . the measure without measure.<sup>16</sup>

Standards are precisely particular things which "measure" other particular things for various attributes, as emerges shortly.

### *Forms and God*

Augustine tends to associate the Forms with the Trinity's second Person: the Son is the first species by which, so to speak, all things are specified, and the form by which all things are formed.<sup>17</sup>

An imperfect being . . . imitates the exemplar in the Word . . . when . . . it . . . receives its proper form. . . . In (its) formation the creature in its own way imitates the divine Word.<sup>18</sup>

Here God the Son takes over the role of Plato's Forms. Again, Augustine writes that

the Form according to which a creature is created exists first in the Word of God before the actual creation of the work itself . . . i.e., in Wisdom coeternal with the Father. . . . In God it is not made but begotten.<sup>19</sup>

This applies to Forms the technical Trinitarian term for the Son's proceeding from the Father. But Augustine finds Forms as truly in the Father and the Spirit:

that very truth, which is . . . the form of all things which were created . . . is in no part dissimilar to . . . the Father.<sup>20</sup>

The Spirit of wisdom . . . has many things in itself. . . . In it are . . . infinite treasures of intelligible things, among which are all invisible, immutable reasons of the visible, changeable things which through that wisdom were made.<sup>21</sup>

What holds equally of Father, Son and Spirit is true of God as a whole.

### *God, Standards and Attributes*

To parse Augustine more carefully, we must say something about standards and attributes. The standard for Fness is, in general, the case of Fness by reference to which other things are "measured" for Fness: it is the standard F. "Measure" can bear ontological or merely epistemic freight here. Consider for instance the standard for the property of being one meter long, the standard meter rod. On one view, being one meter long at *t* is the property of being just as long as this rod is at *t*. On another, being one meter long at *t* is the property of being just as long at *t* as this rod *was* at the moment when it was baptized "the standard meter."

On these views, the standard “measures” other things in that having the property of being one meter long consists in having a relation of congruence to the standard meter rod. What appears to be a non-relational attribute—being one meter long—turns out, deep down, to be a relational attribute of which the standard meter rod is a constituent. On other views, being one meter long is a property with no essential connection with any particular rod. On one such, the standard meter rod as it was when baptized is just the *referentially* standard instance of the property, that by reference to which we pick out that property. On another it is the property’s *epistemically* standard instance, in that by grasping the length that bar had then, we would best know what length objects one meter long have. Let us focus on the first two views, as they afford the best analogue to Augustine’s.

If the first is true, then the standard meter rod, at *t*, is the standard for being one meter long at *t*. This rod is an instance of the property—it is one meter long. It is *exactly* one meter long. It is so by definition, for to be one meter long at *t* is to be the length of that rod at *t*. Now the rod shrinks and expands as its surroundings’ temperature changes. So we may wonder whether on this view how long one meter is changes. In a sense, no. One meter is always one meter—since to be that length at *t* is just to be the length of this bar at *t*. But if how long one meter is does not change, which objects are one meter long changes as the bar grows and shrinks. Yet in a different sense, how long one meter is does change. Suppose there is also a standard inch rod, and its growth and shrinkage are not perfectly in tandem with the meter rod’s. Then the number of inches in a meter does alter over time. If the second view is true, then the rod at the moment of baptism was the standard and was exactly one meter long—again, just because it *was* the standard. On this alternative, the standard meter rod at *t* might not be one meter long—it may have grown or shrunk, so that it is no longer the length it was when it was baptized. But still being one meter long is an attribute involving a relation to the rod (as it was then).

To be *F*, for things other than the standard, consists in having the right relation to the standard. Standards generate non-degreed attributes if this relation is not degreed. To measure up to the standard meter rod is to be perfectly congruent with it lengthwise. A thing either is one meter long or is not, i.e., it is either perfectly congruent lengthwise with the standard meter or not. And so there are no such things as degrees of being one meter long. Being like Elvis is a standard-involving degreed attribute. By being Elvis, Elvis is automatically the standard to which Elvis impersonators approximate. Elvis is exactly like Elvis, because he *is* Elvis. Others are more or less like Elvis just insofar as they are more or less like *him*, the standard Elvis. The measuring-up relation here is likeness, which is degreed. And so there are degrees of being like Elvis.

Let us now apply our talk of standards to Augustine. When Augustine calls God the supreme measure, he asserts *inter alia* that for items other than God, for some range of attributes  $\Phi$ , to be  $\Phi$  is to “measure up to” God in a particular way to some degree, i.e., that

2.  $(\exists\Phi)(\text{God is the perfect } \Phi \text{ by right relation to which other things are } \Phi)$ .

(2) offers an account of the real constitution of cases of  $\Phi$  other than God's: for these, to be  $\Phi$  is to have a particular relation to God.<sup>22</sup> What about God's  $\Phi$ ness? Plato held that the Form for any F is itself F—that the Form Wisdom, for instance, is wise. Many criticize Plato for this, taking Forms to be general attributes, and so taking Plato to have confused a particular case of wisdom with the general attribute, wisdom.<sup>23</sup> We have seen Augustine say that wisdom is wise. But his claim need involve no such confusion. If “wisdom” refers to a standard for wisdom, it refers to a perfect case of wisdom, to which other cases may measure up. One would expect a perfect case of wisdom to be wise: which is why Augustine called it absurd to deny that wisdom is wise. Let us also be clear: for Augustine, God, not God's wisdom, is the standard case of wisdom. To be wise is not to be like God's wisdom. It is to be like God, who is wise. Further, for Augustine, God has no accidents.<sup>24</sup> God's wisdom is just God. So for Augustine, it is not the case that one is wise like the wise God by having a case of wisdom which is like God's case of wisdom. One is wise by so “participating in” God that one counts as wise.

Plato held that Forms' natures determine attributes' natures—to be good, say, is to “participate in” The Good, and so what The Good is determines what it is that the good acquire by “participating” in it. Plato did not make clear what “participation” is.<sup>25</sup> But it is at least likeness plus some sort of real dependence: anything's being good consists in its depending on the paradigm of goodness, The Good, for a likeness to that paradigm. If so, then again, The Good's nature determines what goodness is. For the nature of the paradigm determines what it is to be like it. Now if good things are like The Good by being good, The Good is like good things in respect of goodness—The Good is good. So a question arises: what is it for The Good to be good? Here Plato got into Third Man trouble.<sup>26</sup> If The Good is good, he reasoned, it has something in common with other good things. So there is a Form, The Good, in which they all participate. But Plato also held that no Form can participate in itself. If so, the Good common to the first Good and all its instances is a second Good—and so *ad infinitum*.

Plato need not have gotten in trouble here. The Good and other good things are good (he could have said) in related ways: the predicate “\_\_ is good” applies to them all in the same sense due to states of affairs with an important commonality. The truthmaker for “A is good” in all cases includes that A is like The Good. For good things other than The Good, what makes it true that they are good is that they depend really on The Good for likeness to The Good. The Good is perfectly like The Good. So it is good, and perfectly so. But it does not have that likeness by depending really on itself. It has that likeness simply by being itself. It is like itself because it is identical with itself: what makes the Good good, and perfectly so, is that it is the Good. Other things are imperfectly like it and so are imperfectly good. There is no Form in which The Good and other good things all participate. The Good is like The Good just by being The Good. This is a “no ontology” view of The Good's goodness. We get its goodness for free given that it is The Good. Thus the Third Man evaporates.

Augustine took God as the paradigm replacing all Forms God might have in common with creatures: his “what He has, He is” identifies with

God Forms in which God might participate and thereby eliminates the Forms. Say that God is The Good—as Augustine did—and we can adapt the logic just sketched: God’s being good is just His being Himself, as The Good’s was. The same goes for the rest of the Forms whose place God takes. There is no need for a trope, universal or other abstract constituent to make it true that God is good (etc.): what serves as the standard for all these things does so just by being itself. So it falls out of Augustine’s Platonist approach to attributes, his replacing Forms with God and my way to defuse the Third Man that where “F” is a predicate which in creatures ascribes a property and God is also F, all of God makes it true that He is F. “What He has, He is”—that is, He is identical with that in Him which makes the relevant predications true.

What of attributes like omnipotence or deity? Omnipotence is simply the maximal degree of a decreed shareable attribute, power. Where an attribute F is decreed, only a maximal-degree case of it can be the standard F. Otherwise it would be possible that something be more F, or be F better, than the standard F.<sup>27</sup> But it is not possible that something be more like Elvis at t than Elvis is at t. So it is precisely by being omnipotent that God is the standard for power. Thus if God is the standard for power in virtue simply of being Himself, He is omnipotent in virtue simply of being Himself. Obviously the same will apply to divine perfections like omniscience and perfect moral goodness. Some think there can be lesser degrees of deity: *II Peter* 1:2 has led to a tradition in Christianity (more prominent in its Eastern branches) of speaking of salvation as involving a limited participation in the divine nature. If we allow for this, God’s deity too falls under the standard/attribute account. Again, either the maximal degree of deity is shareable or it is a divine haecceity. If the former, God can be the standard, the meter-rod for other deities. This needn’t be an arbitrary claim. It’s standard to hold that God creates and constantly conserves all other concrete things. So on the standard view, if there are other deities, God made and conserves them. If God made the other deities, then God is the perfect deity on which other deities really depend for their (perfect) likeness to a perfect deity: other deities’ relation to God is enough like “participation” that it is no stretch to ascribe to God the role of the Form of deity. If the latter, it’s a reasonable suggestion on general grounds that the truthmaker for ascribing a haecceity to a necessary being be just that being itself: we need a haecceity distinct from the being that would bear it only if it is possible for the haecceity to exist uninstanced. So a divine haecceity needn’t bring anything with it to violate divine simplicity. Augustine, as a Platonist, was happy to think of existence and unity as decreed.<sup>28</sup> So in his eyes even attributes every being must have can be conceived in terms of degrees of conformity to a standard. If we do not find talk of decreed existence (etc.) attractive, we can treat God’s existence, self-identity and other universal attributes as we did His maximal-degree deity on the assumption that it could be shared. And so these too needn’t involve a distinct divine constituent of some sort: God can (say) exist just by being Himself. Thus these too can be treated in a way compatible with Augustine’s DDS.

If we read Augustine this way, several things follow.



## Plantinga

One is that Plantinga's second problem does not arise. If we so read Augustine's DDS, "God = Justice" does not claim that God is a property. It asserts rather that God is the standard for justice. On my account, a standard is any item with a particular role: the standard for justice, say, is a particular just thing, the just thing such that to be just is to be like *this* just thing (in a particular way), and therefore the just thing which determines what it is to be just.<sup>29</sup> So one pre-requisite for being the standard for justice is being a just thing. Abstract entities cannot be just. Only persons can. On my account, then, *only* a person could be the standard for justice. I do not say: only a person's justice. On my account, standards are concrete.

On this reading, claims like "God = Justice" might actually attract theists. For any Western theist, God is the ideally just being. On Augustine's view as I read it, that God is "merely" the ideal *case* of justice does not entail that what justice is—what it is to be just—is set somehow independent of and prior to God. Instead, what God is determines what it is to be just—i.e., what it takes to be like God in the right way and degree to count as just. What better, deeper account of what it is to be just could there be (a theist might think) than one which defines it in terms of likeness to God? That the present reading of DDS makes "God = Justice" attractive counts in its favor. For it then provides a charitable explanation for Augustine's accepting such identities.

On my reading Plantinga's first problem does not arise either. Augustine's DDS does not identify power and wisdom even if God has both. It asserts only that the standard for wisdom = the standard for power = God. (1)'s real force, on my account, is that for all non-relational F, if God is F, God is the standard F. On Augustine's view power and wisdom remain distinct attributes: to be like God as powerful things are is not to be like God as wise things are.

But this move does not get DDS wholly out of the woods. One item certainly can serve as the standard for two distinct attributes. If the standard meter bar weighs a kilogram, it can be both the standard meter and the standard kilo, without having it follow that being a meter long = weighing a kilo, or that to be measured in length is to be measured in weight. But this analogy is imperfect. The standard meter bar can also be the standard kilo because it has two distinct attributes (weight and length). If God is simple, he does not. So it remains unclear how one simple item can be the standard for two attributes. If the standard for mercy = the standard for power = God, one might well think that something cannot be like God in respect of power without *ipso facto* being like God in respect of mercy. So seemingly DDS requires power and mercy to be at least necessarily coextensive—which they are not.

I submit that DDS does not entail that power and mercy are necessarily coextensive. It implies only that God is such that for other things to be merciful is for them partially to imitate Him. This raises a question: how can one partially imitate something without parts? There can be a partial imitation of a thing with a left and right half because (say) one can draw just its left half. There can be a partial imitation of someone with two attributes, power and mercy, because (say) one can be as powerful as that

person without being as merciful. If God is simple, it might seem, He's not the sort of thing that can be partially imitated. But what makes an imitation partial may be entirely a function of what does the imitating. An imitation is a representation in a certain medium and style. A portrait painting looks somewhat like its subject. But the resemblance is imperfect—partial—because there is a limit to how much canvas and paint can look like a flesh-and-blood human. Epicurean atoms were supposed to be extended simples. If there were such things, a painting of one would only partially resemble it despite its simplicity. Again, what makes A partially represent C in one medium and style can differ from what makes B partially represent C in another: compare cubist, Dadaist and impressionist portraits of Louis Armstrong, and compare with all these Duke Ellington's "Portrait of Louis Armstrong." The paintings all have the same original, and so in some sense something is common to them all: but without a photo of the original you might not see it at all. It could fail to be obvious from the way they look. And representations may not look alike at all: there is no way Ellington's portrait looks. Mercy is a partial representation of God in the medium of response to evils others suffer or wrongs they commit. Power is a partial representation of God in the medium of action. (Thus whatever represents Mercy represents Power, but not necessarily *vice-versa*.) The media are parts of the attributes' natures, as being a jazz composition is part of the nature of Ellington's "Portrait." The distinctness of the media guarantees the distinctness of the attributes. It may also guarantee that even though they have the same original, we can't pick up on what makes them represent the same original. But this is compatible with their both being partial representations of a single standard. Power and mercy in God are not partial representations of God. They are not representations of God at all, and do not involve media. So they needn't be distinct in God, even if they are distinct in all other cases.

Here one might object as follows. Suppose that an act represents Power. Power = Mercy. So the act also represents Mercy. If they are identical, whatever represents one must represent the other. So when Hitler exercised power over the Jews, his acts represented Mercy, and the mercy of God. I reply with a distinction in a parallel case. A picture of the first star coming out in the evening represents the Evening Star, and Venus. A picture of the last star fading out in the morning represents the Morning Star and Venus, which is both morning and evening star. But in one sense it does and in another it does not represent the Evening Star. We can dub the sense in which it does *de re* representation: in this sense, all that counts is that the picture represents the very object which is the Evening Star. The sense in which it does not can be dubbed attributive representation: in this sense, one represents the F only if one both represents the object which is the F and represents it as the F, i.e., depicts it as the F and so "attributes" being the F to it. Hitler's acts partially attributively represent Power and *de re* represent God, who is the standard for power. If Hitler had power and God is the standard for power, one can't avoid these claims. But that Hitler's power was like God's doesn't entail that his use of his power was in the relevant ways like God's use of His. Hitler's acts represent God under the aspect of power, not mercy. They do not attributively represent Mercy, or the mercy of God.

Here is another way to understand one thing being the paradigm of all other things in respect of goodness and (say) wisdom without these being distinct attributes it has. God, being omniscient, grasps all there is to know about His nature. He generates concepts fully to comprehend it. While there is no distinct attribute of goodness in Him, still, if what we assert when we say that God is good is true, there must be something about Him the concept of goodness represents. So God has something like this concept also, to represent that about Him to Himself. If He did not, He would fail fully to comprehend Himself. Having the concept, God causes creatures to be good, which is to say to instance that concept. So a divine concept mediates their likeness to God. For creatures, to be good is to satisfy God's concept of goodness and so be like The Good, i.e., be like that which is the paradigm for all other good things both as a Form is and by being the ultimate original reality to represent which God originally formed the concept of goodness. They are like God in their goodness insofar as they fall under one divine concept, and in their wisdom insofar as they fall under another. For God, to be good is to be the paradigm to represent which the concept was formed and thereby to satisfy God's concept of goodness. For creatures, it is *inter alia* to satisfy the concept and therefore be like the paradigm. So I suggest that if we can in fact apply such terms as "good" univocally to both a simple God and creatures, this helps us to give an account of how one simple item can be the paradigm for many attributes. I now argue that we can.

### *Univocity*

On the account I find in Augustine, a creature is merciful by conforming to a standard and thus having an attribute. God is merciful by being the standard for that attribute. A creature is merciful by representing God. God is not merciful by representing God, but instead by being God. So one may wonder: does "God is merciful" assert about God the same thing "Joe is merciful" asserts about Joe? The difference between a standard and an item it "measures" may seem to threaten massive equivocation *in divinis*. But it shouldn't. The standard meter rod is one meter long by being the standard (on the first view discussed above) or was one meter long when baptized by being the standard then (on the second). All the same, it is one meter long in just the same sense anything else is.

One can distinguish what we come to understand about a thing when we learn that it is F, the contribution of "    is F" to the truth-conditions of sentences of the form "A is F" (equivalently, what we assert about A by calling it F), and the underlying situation that makes it true that A is F. On some well-regarded approaches, these can differ dramatically. Told that a stuff is gold, we come to understand, say, that it conforms to a certain stereotype. But perhaps "this is gold" asserts that this is of the same natural kind as a paradigm batch of stuff, and what makes it true that this is gold is that (enough of) its atoms have a particular atomic weight. Perhaps divine and human acts match up to our stereotype of exercising mercy equally well. This can be true *regardless* of what is the case for the second and third factors. So DDS does not affect the plausibility of claiming that we can understand "    is merciful" in terms of the same stereotype in di-

vine and created cases. For to be merciful is just to have a disposition that issues (often enough) in merciful acts, and both divine and human acts of mercy may conform to our mercy-stereotype if we have one that is good enough. I suggest that where God and creatures can both be F, “Fa” asserts that a is like God in the F-way to some degree. To be an F is in these cases to be like God in the F-way to some degree. If God is F, God is like God in the F-way to some degree. If God is the standard F, God is that which Fs, *qua* Fs, are like. Likeness is symmetric. So God is like Fs in the way Fs, *qua* Fs, are like God. Fs, *qua* Fs, are like God in the F-way. So God is like God as Fs, *qua* Fs, are like God—that is, like God in the F-way. Nothing seems to bar the claim that we assert the same thing of God in “God is merciful” as we do of Joe in “Joe is merciful.”

It is informative to call God merciful. One may wonder whether my account lets us maintain that “God is merciful” carries information. But it is informative to say that His acts conform to our stereotype for merciful acts and He is such as to produce such acts. It is equally informative to assert that God is like God in the merciful-way. For it is not the case that for every F, God is like God in the F-way. God is not like God as squares, *qua* squares, are like God, and perhaps there is no way squares, *qua* squares are like God.<sup>30</sup> And so it is informative to learn that God *is* like God in a particular F-way. Again, to say that God is like God as merciful things are like God implies *inter alia* that God falls under a particular divine concept, if we accept an earlier suggestion of mine. There is information in this—different concept, different information.

I claim, then, that the predicate “is like God in the F-way,” and so the predicate “\_\_ is F,” applies univocally to God and creatures. What differ are the ways God and creatures come to satisfy this predicate—the underlying situation that makes the predications true. Joe is like God by having a relation of likeness to something distinct from Himself. God is like God simply by being Himself. God’s being Himself analytically involves His being like Himself; being like Himself is internal to, as it were part of, His identity with Himself. (“That looks like Elvis over there.” “Of course it looks like Elvis—it *is* Elvis.”) Joe’s being like God is not in the same way part of Joe’s being Joe. Having an attribute is depending on a standard distinct from what has the attribute. So Joe has attributes and so satisfies predicates; a simple God has no attributes (on this account of what it is to have them) and yet satisfies the same predicates taken in the same senses. And so as I read the Augustinian view, these predicates apply in the same sense in virtue of radically different underlying metaphysical situations. Thus while we may know just what we mean in asserting that God is merciful, and furthermore might have reason to think it true, we have no guarantee that we have any cognitive grip on the state of affairs that makes it true. The univocity-thesis I’m asserting is compatible with a great deal of agnosticism about God: we may have no grip on how the reality makes true what we say. I add finally that as I read Augustine, on his view it is trivially (and in some cases vacuously) true that for any F God has intrinsically, God is maximally or perfectly F. For of course God is maximally or perfectly like God in every way He is like God.

It may seem odd to say that Augustine’s DDS is compatible with a sort of univocity in predications of God and creatures. For Augustine

was influenced by Neo-Platonism, which stressed the ineffability of the simple One.<sup>31</sup> And Augustine himself makes some ineffability claims.<sup>32</sup> But he also makes many positive predications about God, and sometimes suggests that the ineffability may consist only in our being unable *fully* to understand what we say about God.<sup>33</sup> And there is one key difference between Augustine and such Neo-Platonists as Plotinus, which should suggest that Neo-Platonic ineffability is not to be expected in Augustine's God. Plotinus held that the simple One is a deity distinct from the divine mind which contains all Forms.<sup>34</sup> It was thus not a standard, unless perhaps for oneness. In Plotinus' eyes it was neither a Form (unless of oneness) nor a participant in a Form: the real basis for positive predication was lacking. Thus the claim that it is ineffable had to follow:

[T]he absolute One . . . comes before "something." It is therefore truly ineffable: for whatever you say about it, you will always be speaking of a something. But "beyond all things . . ." is the only one of all the ways of speaking of it which is true. It is not its name, but says that it is not one of all things and has no name, because we can say nothing of it: we only try, as far as possible, to make signs to ourselves about it.<sup>35</sup>

[W]e have the One in such a way that . . . we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it.<sup>36</sup>

[E]very object of thought . . . is posterior to the One and is derived from it.<sup>37</sup>

[T]his name . . . One . . . was given it in order that the seeker, beginning from this which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate this as well.<sup>38</sup>

[I]t is false even to say of the One that it is one.<sup>39</sup>

It has been said that Plotinus would have called this the Zero rather than the One had he the concept of zero.<sup>40</sup> Now the difference between Augustine and Plotinus is that Augustine sees one deity where Plotinus saw two. Unwilling to tolerate multiple divinities, Augustine identified the simple One and the divine mind which is or contains all Forms. God as Augustine sees Him is both simple and a standard. The simple One is not a standard (save perhaps of unity). Thus Augustine's position is so designed that Neo-Platonist claims about ineffability will not apply to it. It might also seem odd to say that univocity flows from Augustine's DDS given that I shortly argue that my claims about Augustine apply also to Aquinas, who is famous for arguing that predicates apply to God and creatures only analogically.<sup>41</sup> I cannot pursue this matter here, but given space I'd argue that the sort of univocity I contend for is really built into his theory of analogy.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Who Else?*

I suggest, then, that Augustine's DDS can meet Plantinga's challenges, and is a more plausible doctrine than it at first appears. One naturally wonders how much of what I've said of Augustine carries over to DDS' later

proponents. So let me mention two of DDS' most influential friends. Anselm is so thoroughly Augustinian that one would be surprised if he did *not* see DDS Augustine's way; the *Monologion*, where he first broaches the doctrine, is largely a *pastiche* drawn from Augustine's *De Trinitate*. So if I have given a correct account of Augustine, it likely applies to Anselm too. Aquinas might seem a less plausible case; he has after all an Aristotelian reputation. But Aquinas does insist that his doctrine of God and the divine ideas "saves the opinion of the Platonists to some degree."<sup>43</sup> Aquinas is perfectly willing to make such Platonist-sounding claims as that God is goodness itself and truth itself.<sup>44</sup> He does this precisely as a consequence of his DDS. Moreover, Aquinas' fourth Way includes premises that "more and less are predicated of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum" and that "the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus" in an argument concluding that there is a highest truth, good and being, to be identified with God.<sup>45</sup> One could show, I think, that this makes most sense against the backdrop of a DDS read along Augustine's lines. I suggest, then, that my reading of Augustine's DDS can help explicate and defend many other Latin Christian versions of DDS as well.

#### *Motivation*

It's not hard to see why Augustine found DDS attractive. He was a Platonist before he was a Christian.<sup>46</sup> As a Platonist he believed in Forms. When he became a Christian, he did not want to see anything as more basic in reality than the Christian God. If there were Forms, they would be more basic than God. The Good's being what it is would lie beneath and explain God's being good. If God is essentially good, He would owe to The Good an essential property, and so His very existence. Identifying God with the relevant Forms avoided this—and so Augustine asserted that "what He has, He is." But we are not now greatly drawn to Platonic Forms. If there is a problem about relations to Forms, we're most likely to deal with it simply by denying the Forms. So one might wonder, finally, whether Augustine's DDS can appeal at all to non-Platonists.

Let's be nominalists rather than Platonists, and ask how God is related to moral norms. It's objectively the case, let's say, that

J. it is just to treat equals equally.

What is God's relation to (J)? If we are nominalists, (J) cannot be somehow there in the nature of things apart from and independent of Him. If (J) itself were anything, it might be an abstract entity. Among abstracta nominalists are comfortable only with sets. It's not at all clear that we can "construct" a proposition that (J) given only pure sets. But if we introduce God or His thoughts as elements for sets, or God's thought that (J) as a proposition that (J), we're no longer dealing in things that are there apart from and independent of God. Further, (J) would require a Platonist or possibilist truthmaker—merely possible cases of justice or a Platonic property of justice whose nature would make (J) true (or to whose existence talk of the truth could be reduced, on a deflationist account of truth). Nominalists reject these.<sup>47</sup> If (J) was true when God alone existed, (J) isn't

a matter of human convention or decision. But we do not want to say that (J) depends on God's choice either. That way lie all the problems of divine command theory. Might (J) somehow rest on what rational-animal nature is, as the natural-law tradition would have it? To say that the content of this nature is independent of God, written in the nature of things, is once again Platonism or possibilism. If its content is up to God, we're back to divine command, with the twist that God issues the commands by setting the content of this nature. If (J) cannot be independent of God and cannot depend on His choice, (J) must depend on something about God which is prior to His choice—some facet of His nature.

But if we are nominalists, we do not believe in attributes, including a divine nature, in any sense that would help here: we might construe deity as the set of all deities, for instance, but it's not clear how this could be what makes (J) true. Save for sets, nominalists believe in God and other concreta. So we can only say that (J) depends on God, but not on His choice. Does (J) depend on some "natural" act of His? If this cannot consist in His recognizing necessary truths written into the nature of things, or into His own nature, it is hard to see what this could mean, or how it could fail to leave the just's nature as finally arbitrary as divine command theories threaten. It might simply mean that (J) depends on an act God does necessarily. But if that act has no justification from the natures of things it is hard to see why it is any the less arbitrary for being one He does necessarily. Here the Augustinian account of attributes offers itself as a way to avoid both arbitrariness and independence of God. If we say that God is the standard by reference to which what it is to be just is defined, we do not appeal to divine will, whether necessary or contingent, and yet the nature of justice, and so the truth of (J), depends on God. So nominalists might well find Augustine's approach to attributes appealing in moral cases. But the approach has a more general appeal as well.

It is standard theism that God is perfectly just. If God is perfectly just, anyone else's justice is in fact an approximation to His.<sup>48</sup> Many theists might like the ring of such claims as that being just at some deep level just *is* a way to be like God: it does not take Platonism to do so. Augustine can perhaps use the independent appeal of these claims to edge theists toward his form of Platonism: if we have an ideal standard, why not build a theory of attributes on it? It makes sense to get all the metaphysical work we can out of an item in our ontology before adding new items. This might motivate Augustinian Platonism for all respects in which God is non-vacuously perfect.<sup>49</sup> If we do not believe in degrees of existence or self-identity, it might not motivate treating *these* in Augustine's way. But we've seen that standard-involving accounts of attributes can apply to non-degreed attributes. And the simplicity of giving a uniform account of attributes and predication would favor extending the Platonist treatment from degreed to non-degreed cases.<sup>50</sup>

If we do go this far, we can then add the no-ontology account of how the standard for Fs itself is F—something with all the force of Ockham's Razor behind it. The result is a single being which is the standard for the attributes expressed by all non-relational predicates that apply to it without any having universals or tropes as constituents. That is, what results is a deity conforming to Augustine's DDS for all divine attributes to which

he applied it. I suggest, then, that Augustine's DDS can indeed appeal to people with no antecedent Platonic leanings.<sup>51</sup>

Oriel College, Oxford

#### NOTES

1. So, e.g., Anselm, *Monologion* 16; Aquinas, *ST Ia* 3. References to Augustine appear below.
2. Which is not to say that his *life* is not extended temporally.
3. Augustine, *Civitas Dei*, XI, x, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, v. 48 (Brepols, 1955), 330, cf. 332. For other statements of DDS see e.g., *De Trinitate* V, x, 11-xi, 12; VII, ii, 2; XV, v, 7-vi, 9.
4. Augustine, *Civitas Dei*, XI, x, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, v. 48 (Brepols, 1955), 331.
5. Augustine exempts relations to allow for distinct relations of procession within the Trinity.
6. *De Trinitate* VI, vi-vii, 8, 237. See also VI, x, 11.
7. So William Mann, "Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 20 (1981), pp. 451-71.
8. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1980), p. 47.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VII, i, 2, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, v. 50 (Brepols, 1968), p. 248.
11. Augustine, *83 Different Questions*, q. 46. As we saw above, the "having" relation Augustine believes in is Platonic participation.
12. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX, vi-vii, 10-2.
13. See e.g., *Euthyphro* 6e, *Cratylus* 390b, *Republic* 601-2, and for discussion, see e.g., R. S. Bluck, "Forms as Standards," *Phronesis* 2 (1957), pp. 115-27; R. E. Allen, "Forms and Standards," *Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (1959), pp. 164-67, and much literature on the Third Man argument.
14. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX, vi, 9.
15. *De Natura Boni*, p. 22.
16. *De Genesi ad Litteram* IV, pp. 3, 7-8.
17. *83 Different Questions*, p. 23.
18. *De Genesi ad Litteram* I, pp. 4, 9.
19. *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Bk. 2, chap. 8, #17, 16.
20. *True Religion*, pp. liii, 113.
21. Augustine, *Civitas Dei* XI, p. 10.
22. As  $\Phi$  is itself an attribute, one naturally wonders whether this account generates some sort of vicious regress. I think not, but the matter bears more discussion than I can give it here: see my "A truly ontological argument," in submission.
23. For survey and discussion, see John Malcolm, *Plato on the Self-Predication of Forms* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1991).
24. *De Trinitate* V, xvi, 17.
25. For discussion, see e.g., Charles Bigger, *Participation: a Platonic inquiry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).
26. Plato, *Parmenides*, 132a-b; "good" is not the example used there.
27. It should be clear, incidentally, that on this sort of view the maximal degree is not independently specified. If a candidate standard for goodness had to measure up to an independently specified maximal degree, there would



have to be a standard to specify what the candidate had to be like and how good a good thing could be—and so our candidate would not be the standard. Rather, on the sort of view we're exploring, the standard determines what counts as the maximum degree, and this is why it comes out true that only a maximal-degree F can be the standard F.

28. For explication see Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 73–111.

29. And if we're being Platonist about it, we add that other just things really depend on the standard for their justice.

30. Augustine deals with squares etc. by invoking divine "ideas" as standards for them. See e.g., *83 Different Questions*, q. 46.

31. See e.g., Plotinus, *Ennead VI*.

32. See e.g., *Commentary on Psalm 85*, p. 12; Sermon 52, vi, p. 16; *Christian Doctrine*, I, vi, p. 6.

33. See e.g., *De Trinitate V*, i, 2 and XV, iv, 6.

34. *Loc. cit.*

35. *Ennead V*, pp. 3, 12–13.

36. *Ennead V*, pp. 3, 14.

37. *Ennead VI*, pp. 9, 3. Some of these translations are A. H. Armstrong's in the Loeb Classics edition; others are based closely on his.

38. *Ennead V*, pp. 5, 6.

39. *Ennead V*, pp. 4, 1.

40. W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, v. 2, pp. 107–8.

41. So e.g., *ST Ia* 13, 5.

42. Which is to say that I think Swinburne is on the right track in *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 76–81.

43. *Summa Contra Gentiles I*, p. 54.

44. *SCG I*, pp. 38 et 60.

45. *ST Ia* 2, 4.

46. So *Confessions*, bk. 7.

47. Or at least want to. It's a good question whether nominalism really can work without positing possibilia. For a case that one prominent sort of nominalism requires these, see Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Resemblance Nominalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

48. Perhaps a perfect one, on the unlikely assumption that someone else is perfectly just.

49. We might say that God is perfectly self-identical, but this would make a vacuous distinction. Nothing can be imperfectly self-identical.

50. Of course, in one way the Platonist account is not uniform: it is disjunctive, offering a different account of what makes something F for God and creatures. But this sort of non-uniformity actually has parallels in the other main theories of attributes. So it doesn't count against the Platonist approach. On this see my "A truly ontological argument," in submission.

51. A residual question raised by a referee: I've given an account of predicates common to God and creatures. What of predicates God doesn't satisfy, e.g., "\_\_\_ is blue"? Here divine ideas come to the fore: to Augustine, the standard for such is a content of the divine mind.