THOMAS V. MORRIS

Department of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame

ON GOD AND MANN: A VIEW OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

One of the most difficult and perplexing tenets of classical theism is the doctrine of divine simplicity. Broadly put, this is generally understood to be the thesis that God is altogether without any proper parts, composition, or metaphysical complexity whatsoever. For a good deal more than a millennium, veritable armies of philosophical theologians – Jewish, Christian and Islamic – proclaimed the truth and importance of divine simplicity. Yet in our own time, the doctrine has enjoyed no such support. Among many otherwise orthodox theists, those who do not just disregard it completely explicitly deny it. However, in a couple of recent articles, William E. Mann has attempted to expound the idea of divine simplicity anew and to defend it against a number of criticisms.[1] He even has gone so far as to hint at reaffirming its importance, suggesting that the doctrine may have a significant amount of explanatory power and other theoretical virtue as part of an overall account of the nature of God, by either entailing or in other ways providing for much else that traditional theists have wanted to say about God. In this paper, I want to take a close look at Mann's formulation of the doctrine and at a general supporting theory he adumbrates in his attempt to render more plausible, or at least more defensible, various of its elements and implications. As Mann has made what is arguably the best attempt to defend the doctrine in recent years, I think that such an examination is important and will repay our efforts.

I. TWO VIEWS OF SIMPLICITY

What exactly the doctrine of divine simplicity is is not easy to say. Clearly Parmenidean in pedigree, the claim that the Ultimate Reality is simple has been articulated within a neo-platonic framework as well as in aristotelian terms. To the extent that its expression in patristic and medieval texts is often terse and somewhat metaphorical, it is not always clear precisely what was being claimed. One noteworthy feature of the contemporary discussion of

---

[1] 'Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies* XVIII (1982), 451–71; and 'Simplicity and Immutability in God', *International Philosophical Quarterly* XXIII 3, (1983) 267–76 (a version of this paper was originally read at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division meeting in 1981).

simplicity is that it has involved no extended effort to examine those original metaphysical contexts for all they might provide us in our attempt to explicate the doctrine.[1] Nevertheless, the main lines of various possible interpretations are fairly clear. In one well known formulation of the doctrine, the following claims are made: We customarily, and permissibly ascribe numerous predicates to God – We say, for example, that God is wise, good and powerful. However, we are not thereby properly attributing a multiplicity of different properties to him. That is, we are not to be understood as holding that God stands in relations of exemplification or participation to a diversity of properties existing distinct from, and independent of, him. In the case of God, and of God alone, there is no multiplicity of properties instantiated. He is rather numerically identical with any property truly attributed to him. Thus, God = Wisdom, God = Goodness, God = Power, God = Justice, and so on. And of course, from this it follows by the principles governing identity that each divine property is identical with every other divine property, which means that in reality there is only one property that God has – a property with which he himself is identical.

Let us refer to this striking formulation of the doctrine as the property view of divine simplicity. Its problems are obvious, and by now widely acknowledged.[2] For one thing, it identifies properties we know to be distinct, properties which are not even co-extensive. And in addition, it seems clearly to imply that God, as a property, is an abstract object. On the basis of these and other implications, it would be hard to find many philosophers who would subscribe to this particular view of divine simplicity. It is one of Mann's objectives to stress that this is not the only way a doctrine of divine simplicity can be formulated. He finds in St. Thomas a subtle distinction which he thinks can be exploited to make a big difference in the plausibility of claims about God's simplicity.

St. Thomas, Mann relates, holds not that God is identical with Wisdom, Power and Justice, but rather that he is identical with *his* wisdom, *his* power, *his* justice and so forth. In this slight variant of expression, Mann sees the key to a defensible formulation of divine simplicity. It is his suggestion that if we understand this small difference as reflecting an important but elementary metaphysical distinction, the absurdities which seem to plague

[1] The contemporary literature on simplicity consists of only a handful of articles and some short discussions in a few books devoted primarily to other topics. The articles include Daniel Bennett, 'The Divine Simplicity', *The Journal of Philosophy* LXVI 19 (October 1966), 629–37; Richard R. La Croix, 'Augustine on the Simplicity of God', *The New Scholasticism* LI 4 (Autumn 1977), 453–69; William J. Wainwright, 'Augustine on God's Simplicity: a Reply', *The New Scholasticism* LIII 1 (Winter 1979), 118–23; and a response by La Croix entitled 'Wainwright, Augustine, and God's Simplicity: a Final Word', op. cit. pp. 124–7. The literature, however, threatens to soon grow significantly, as a number of papers are now being prepared by philosophers who, like Mann, seek to revive and defend the doctrine in one form or another. Especially noteworthy is a forthcoming essay by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump entitled 'God's Simplicity and God's Free Choice'.

[2] For the best known contemporary discussion of these problems, see Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, (1980), pp. 26 ff.

the property view of simplicity can be avoided completely. The distinction he draws is one between properties and property instances. Roughly, a property is an abstract object capable of exemplification. A property instance is a particular exemplification of a property. A great number of property instances, moreover, are concrete particulars. What Mann most likely has in mind here is something like a distinction between the rectangularity of this page, as a feature of the page existing in space and time, and the property of rectangularity, which exists only as an abstract object.

The application of this distinction to the doctrine of divine simplicity is, then, straightforward. God can be held to be identical with his instantiation of wisdom, his instantiation of power, and, generally, his instantiation of any property which holds true of him. From this formulation of the doctrine, it will not follow that wisdom is one and the same property as power, and so on, but only that the instance of wisdom we have in the case of God is one and the same concrete particular as the instance of power we find in deity. And although this latter claim may sound a bit mysterious at first, it – unlike the identification of patently different properties – is in no way clearly absurd. Furthermore, this formulation of the doctrine obviously does not make God out to be an abstract object. It characterizes him rather as an individual property instance, a special sort of concrete particular.

Let us refer to Mann's formulation as the property instance view of divine simplicity. Like the property view, it is meant to be a comprehensive thesis holding true in the case of every one of God's properties. Unlike the property view, Mann thinks, it is a reasonable position for a theist to hold. Before we examine whether the property instance view can succeed on both counts, we should first note an important difference between it and the property view as yet unmentioned.

Alvin Plantinga has suggested that a major reason theists historically adopted a doctrine of divine simplicity was to accommodate what he calls a 'sovereignty – aseity intuition', a fundamental conviction that God must be such as to depend on nothing distinct from himself for what he is, and such that he has everything distinct from himself within his absolute control.[1] The connection between this intuition and simplicity was forged by the following sort of argument: What God's nature is, and what his character is, consists in his having certain properties rather than others. Now if these properties constitutive of his nature and character were abstract objects distinct from God, he would be dependent on something distinct from himself for what he is. Furthermore, there would then be certain connections between him and these distinct objects which would not be wholly within his control. If there can be absolutely no sense in which God depends on anything distinct from him, and no sense in which anything can be outside

[1] Ibid.

his control, then the properties God has cannot have an ontological status distinct from him.

Any such ontological distinctness is eliminated by simply identifying God with any property he has. Thus the sovereignty–aseity intuition can motivate a doctrine of divine simplicity. But notice that the view of simplicity required to accommodate such absolute sovereignty and aseity is the property view. The property instance view will not do the job. For it allows that there is at least one property existing distinct from God as an abstract object on which God is, in some sense, dependent for what he is – an instance of that property. So whatever we think about the sovereignty-aseity intuition at work in this argument, we must acknowledge that it will not act as a motivation for adopting a property instance view of simplicity. If this version of the doctrine of divine simplicity is to be a reasonable position for a theist to hold, other reasons must be found for subscribing to it.

Although Mann does not acknowledge this difference between the property view and his own favoured property instance view – indeed, he articulates his view after delineating briefly the aseity motivation for a doctrine of simplicity, and without noting the lack of motivational connection with his own formulation – he does in fact suggest some other reason that theists might have for adopting a property instance doctrine of simplicity. In brief, he seems to see the view of simplicity he expounds as the most general account available of the metaphysical nature of deity which will be free of any obviously false implications while at the same time entailing, and allowing for a defence of, some of the other striking and important claims about God which have been propounded as central elements in the tradition of rational theology. Most importantly, Mann contends, his view entails that God is timeless, and, independently, that he is immutable. He suggests further that it has explanatory value with respect to these other doctrines about God's nature.[1] And to the extent that these other claims are valued and at the same time thought to be in some need of more general theoretical support, if Mann is right, then there would seem to be at least *prima facie* grounds to recommend his view of simplicity logically distinct from the now irrelevant sovereignty–aseity intuition.

But in order to give any more complete assessment of his view, we must attend to its components a bit more carefully and take a look at the elements of a supporting theory he constructs for it.

2. RICH PROPERTIES

It is just absurd to identify God as an abstract object, as the property view seems to do. It is at least not so obviously absurd to characterize God as a

---

[1] This becomes especially clear in the later article 'Simplicity and Immutability in God'.

property instance if we remember that a property instance is meant to be the sort of thing which can be a concrete particular. But we might well wonder whether in the final analysis this is just as unacceptable a claim. For our clearest examples of what Mann might be intending with his distinction between properties and property instances involve as instances such things as the rectangularity of this page, the linear arrangement of these words, the blackness of this ink. And these property instances are all features or aspects of something, and of something apparently more ontologically fundamental than themselves. For the identity of this page could survive the excision of its rectangularity if, for example, its corners were cut off, but the rectangularity of this page conversely could not survive the destruction of the page itself.

Is every property instance merely a feature of something more fundamental than itself? If so, and God is a property instance, the clearly unacceptable consequence will follow that God is a feature of something ontologically more fundamental than himself. This would not be much of an improvement on the view that God is an abstract object. However, Mann introduces a notion which, if acceptable, could be used to block the claim that this characteristic holds true of every sort of property instance. The notion he introduces is that of a rich property.

A rich property is defined by Mann as a conjunctive property having as its conjuncts all and only properties which hold true of a particular individual. These will include, he says, both essential and accidental properties. So in the case of any object, however ontologically fundamental, there will exist a corresponding rich property. It is Mann's suggestion that all objects can be viewed as property instances of their appropriate rich property. On this conception, every individual is numerically identical with a property instance. This will hold true of tables, chairs, pages, Mann himself, and of course, God. Certain property instances thus are not features of anything more fundamental than themselves. These are instances of rich properties. Mann's argument is that on the property instance view of divine simplicity, God is held to be numerically identical with just this sort of property instance, an instance of a rich property. For if God is identical with an instance of each of his properties, it follows that in his case there exists only one property instance, however many properties he has being exemplified. And whenever all of a being's properties are exemplified in one property instance, it will follow that that instance can be nothing other than an instance of what Mann calls a rich property. Thus the view that God is a property instance does not seem to imply after all any sort of unacceptable feature-dependency of God on something more fundamental than himself.

This defence of the property instance view of divine simplicity clearly relies on the conception Mann gives us of a rich property. And that conception itself can appear to be plagued with problems. I am supposed to be an instance of my rich property. And my rich property is supposed to be

composed of all my properties. If this is supposed to be inclusive of all the properties I ever will have, a problem arises. For presumably I shall exemplify next year properties I do not now have. There are then components of my rich property which will not have instances in my case until next year. But if a rich property just is a conjunctive property composed, and one assumes, composed essentially, of its conjunct properties, then it stands to reason that the existence of an instance of a rich property essentially depends on the instantiation of each of its conjunct properties. So if some of my rich property's conjuncts are not yet instantiated in my case, no instance of my rich property yet exists. And if I am an instance of my rich property, I do not yet exist. And of course, it follows more generally by the same reasoning that no sort of temporal being ever can exist.

This problem, however, can be held not to impugn the notion of a rich property itself, nor even to be relevant at all to the claim that God is an instance of a rich property, but only to block any claim that an existent temporal being is an instance of such a property. As simple, God would have no temporal parts, and so this problem would not touch his case. But it will block the general claim that every object can be identified as an instance of a rich property, and that in at least this respect, on Mann's view God's ontological status is not altogether without parallel; that is, unless the notion of a rich property should be restricted in some way.

The most obvious restriction that comes to mind would be to limit an individual's rich property to a conjunction of all and only its intuitively essential properties. On this conception, the claim that any individual, temporal or atemporal, is identical with its rich property would avoid altogether the problem just mentioned. Further, it would avoid another problem Mann's more liberal conception can be held to have – a problem of modal uniformity.

I think that Mann could have avoided ever writing on simplicity. The property of having written on simplicity is surely not one of his essential properties. But it is one of the conjunct properties in his rich property, liberally conceived. If we understand a rich property to be individuated by means of, and to be essentially related to, its conjunct properties, and view a property instance as a sort of thing which is essentially tied to the property of which it is an instance, then the commonly accepted and quite reasonable view that all metaphysical identities are necessary precludes one from holding both that Mann is identical with what is as a matter of fact his rich property instance and that he could have avoided ever tangling with simplicity. If an individual's rich property is understood to involve all its properties, then one can identify an individual with the exemplification of its rich property only on pain of holding all its properties to be essential. If we want, as Mann does, to acknowledge individuals as having accidental as well as essentail properties, and want to identify those individuals with instances of conjunctive properties,

we must include as conjuncts only properties we independently and intuitively recognize as essential to them.

Let us call the sort of conjunctive property with whose instances we can identify the ordinary individuals or substances of our conceptual scheme without modally unacceptable consequences an haecceity. Mann could then hold that every individual is a property instance of an haecceity, and that in this respect the doctrine of a divine simplicity he espouses does not make God any different from anything else. He, like anything else, is a property instance. And he is the sort of property instance which does not exist as a mere feature of something more fundamental then himself. He is an instance of an haecceity.

It is worth noting, however, that on the supporting theory Mann develops, the distinction between an haecceity and a rich property liberally construed collapses in the case of God in an interesting way. How this happens will become clear in the next section. Right now, we need to attend to another implication of his version of divine simplicity. In trying to recommend his property instance view of simplicity, Mann has to render plausible the consequence that the instance of each property God has is identical with the instance of every other divine attribute, as well as defending the central claim that God is a property instance. To this end, he sketches out some elements of a theory of property and property instance identity, to which we now turn.

3. PROPERTIES, PROPERTY INSTANCES AND GOD

Under what conditions will an instance of a property F be identical with an instance of a property G? In answer to this question, Mann presents the following principle:[1]

> C – Property instances *the F-ness of x* and *the G-ness of y* are identical if and only if (1) the property *being F* is necessarily coextensive with the property *being G* and (2) $x = y$.

On the basis of principle C, the theist who wants to hold that God's omnipotence = God's omniscience need only claim that omnipotence and omniscience are properties which are necessarily coextensive – exemplified by all the same objects in all possible words in which either is exemplified. Now, as Mann points out, the theist may have a good deal of difficulty in trying to *demonstrate* the necessary coextensiveness of any conceptually distinct divine attributes, but what is important to note is that this is a position that many theists are inclined to adopt – at least with respect to such properties as omniscience, omnipotence, aseity, necessary goodness and the like – and many have this inclination who would otherwise tend to shy away from any sort of simplicity doctrine. Indeed, as I have suggested elsewhere, the thesis

---

[1] 'Divine Simplicity', p. 465.

that at least some divine properties are necessarily coextensive may be an important part of any argument that the God of the philosophers is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that the conception of God as a maximally perfect being is fully consonant with all the deepest concerns of a biblically or revelationally oriented religious faith.[1] It is Mann's contention that this thesis will render more plausible the major consequence of the claim that God is identical with an instance of each of his properties, namely the entailment that each of his property instances is one and the same as each other one – that, for example, his necessary goodness is his aseity, which is his omnipresence, and so on.

But why should we think that C is true? It is one thing to claim that necessary coextensiveness of properties is *necessary* for the identity of property instances, but quite another to go on and claim this to be *sufficient* as well (given, of course, the identity of the property bearer involved). Triangularity and trilaterality are necessarily coextensive properties, as understood in Euclidean geometry. Yet why should we say that an instance of one is one and the same concrete particular as an instance of the other? If many property instances are *features* of objects, isn't three-sidedness a different feature of a given geometrical figure than that of having three angles? In order to allay our suspicions here, Mann introduces an element of a theory about properties which I shall not discuss on its own merits, but whose main thrust and implications we need to note.

Mann suggests as reasonable to hold a principle of property identity according to which necessarily coextensive properties are identical. Acknowledging that there are some apparently counter-intuitive consequences of such a position, he nevertheless argues that it is a fully defensible view to take along the spectrum of possible views on property identity. And if such a principle is adopted, our questions about C vanish. For surely, if F and G are not only necessarily coextensive, but actually one and the property, there is no question that an instance of F is an instance of G.

Let us look then at some of the implications that C and this supporting claim have for the case of God. God's instantiation of omnipotence will be identical with his instantiation of omniscience only if omniscience and omnipotence are necessarily coextensive. And this can be so only if they actually are one and the same property. The same consequence, of course, likewise holds for any apparent pair of God's properties. So there can be only one divine property instance – one with which God is identical – only if there is not more than one divine property. Thus, as Mann acknowledges, God's rich property is a limiting case of a conjunctive property, one composed of only one conjunct. And on any reasonable essentialist metaphysic, an object such as God must have at least one essential property. So it follows that God

[1] This is discussed in 'The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm', *Faith and Philosophy* 1, 2 (April 1984), 177–187.

is an instance of a property which is essential to him. This is why on Mann's view we have in the case of God a collapse of the distinction between a rich property, liberally construed, and an haecceity.

Now this panoply of distinctions and principles Mann introduces to construct and defend a view of divine simplicity has a number of consequences which require examination. First, for all their differences, the property instance view of simplicity Mann presents and the property view have in common, as has just been pointed out, an entailment we might not initially have anticipated: In the case of God, only one property is involved. On the property view it is one with which God is identical. On Mann's view, it is one whose instance God is.

This consequence is problematic in more than one way. First, there arises from it a problem of modal uniformity, a sort of problem one version of which has already been considered in connection with Mann's original definition of a rich property. Here it arises quite simply. God's properties obviously cannot differ among themselves in modal status if he has in reality only one property. But theists traditionally hold that God is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and good, yet only contingently or accidentally such that he created this world, called Abram out of Ur, spoke through Moses, and so forth. It follows from Mann's account of divine simplicity, as well as from the property view, that no such modal discriminations can be made with respect to God. And surely this is unacceptable.

Secondly, there may be in addition what we might call a supervenience problem for this conclusion about the divine attributes. The problem is this: Standard conceptions of some divine attributes seem to be conceptions of essentially supervenient properties – properties which can be exemplified only in virtue of other distinct properties being exemplified. Now, the notion of supervenience is quite common in contemporary philosophy and, difficult though it might be to understand completely, is basically a simple notion to grasp. If a property F supervenes a property G, then an instance of F essentially depends on there being some instance of G in association with which it exists, in the sense that no instance of F could exist unless some underlying instance of G existed simultaneously.[1] With this sort of relation in mind, a number of recent philosophers have claimed, for example, that human personality essentially supervenes upon corporeality of a sufficiently intricate sort of structure.

Many theists hold a conception of omniscience according to which God is omniscient in virtue of, at least in part, knowing all true propositions. If the 'in virtue of' locution is taken seriously here, then it would seem that God's omniscience is being held to supervene on his knowing this, his knowing that, and so on. Likewise, many would hold that God is omnipotent

[1] An instance of F need not depend for its identity on the continuing existence of a particular instance of G; rather, it requires only some instance or other of G.

in virtue of being able to do any of a suitably delimited set of tasks, or in virtue of having all powers of a certain sort, or in virtue of being able to actualize this sort of state of affairs, and that sort, and so on. In either case, it appears that some divine attribute is viewed as exemplified only in virtue of some other distinct properties being had. So, on this understanding, God cannot be omnipotent or omniscient unless he has more than one property. if he has any such attribute, Mann's view cannot be right. At least one property of God's would supervene upon numerically distinct properties which he would, in addition, have to have.

It might be objected that it is not the case that God is omniscient in virtue of knowing p, q, r and so forth, but rather that he knows any such true propositions in virtue of being omniscient. But of course no mere reversal of precedence here will solve the supervenience problem. For then God's property of knowing that p will supervene upon God's being omniscient and p's being true. And any case of supervenience among divine properties whatsoever will suffice to block Mann's views.

The only move remaining would be to deny any supervenience relation between God's omniscience and any of his more closely specified properties of knowing. And of course this is what Mann's position dictates. If God is omniscient, then presumably he knows that Mann has written on simplicity (or, possibly, something like 'Mann writes on simplicity from t_i $-t_n$). And if he is simple, he is identical with his exemplification of the property of knowing that truth. But then his instance of that property must be identical with his omniscience. And on Mann's theory, it certainly seems as if this can be so only if the property of knowing that Mann writes at some time on simplicity is necessarily coextensive with, indeed identical with, the property of being omniscient. Yet I and many others have the former property without, unfortunately, the latter. These properties are not necessarily coextensive, so on principle C, none of their respective instances can be identical, one with the other. It looks as if the only way to avoid the supervenience problem, a move actually dictated by Mann's theory, requires identities which his own principle of property instance identity will not allow.

And even apart from any need to avoid the supervenience problem, the same sort of difficulty arises for Mann's views with respect to other properties. For God is knowledgeable and he is powerful. on the property instance view of divine simplicity, he must be identical with his knowledge and identical with his power, and so these property instances must be identical with each other. But on principle C, this can be so only if knowledge and power are necessarily coextensive, which they are not.

However, in some general remarks he makes when presenting his views, Mann recognizes a distinction which could be used to provide for his extrication from these difficulties. He first makes the, by now, common distinction between great-making properties (properties it is intrinsically

better to have than to lack) which admit of degrees, and those which are not degreed. The property of being knowledgeable would be an example of a degreed great-making property, while that of existing *a se* could be a fairly clear example of a non-degreed property. Further, among degreed properties we can distinguish those with intrinsic logical maxima from those which admit of unlimited increase in degree. Mann claims that the properties of being knowledgeable and of being powerful are degreed great-making properties with intrinsic maxima. He identifies their maxima as, respectively, omniscience and omnipotence.[1] It is his allegation that while the properties of knowledge and power vary somewhat independently through their less-than maximal degrees, they coalesce into one and the same property in their maxima. Thus, although it is not a general truth that knowledge and power are necessarily coextensive, and certainly not the case that they are identical, it is nonetheless true that omniscience and omnipotence are both necessarily coextensive and, indeed, one and the same property.

With these acknowledged distinctions in mind, it might be thought that Mann could claim that God's knowledge is God's power since God's knowledge is nothing other than his omniscience, his power is none other than his omnipotence, and principle C does countenance his omniscience being identical with his omnipotence. Thus by the symmetry and transitivity of identity it would follow that his knowledge is his power. But principle C as it stands will not license two of the premises of this argument – the claim that God's knowledge is his omniscience, and that his power is his omnipotence. For knowledge and omniscience, and power and omnipotence are not necessarily coextensive properties.

Principle C, however, could be amended to take care of that, employing the distinctions just drawn among degreed and non-degreed properties. It then might look something like this:

> C 1 – Property instances *the F-ness of x* and the *G-ness of y* are identical if and only if (1) the property *being F* is necessarily coextensive with the property *being G*, or (2) at least one of those properties is a degreed property with an intrinsic maximum, and that maximal degree is necessarily coextensive with either (a) the other property, or (b) the intrinsic maximum of the other property, and (3) $x = y$.

On this revised version of C, it could be held that the knowledge of God is his omniscience, his power is his omnipotence, and then that his knowledge is his power.

But what about God's apparently distinct property of knowing that Mann writes on simplicity? C blocks the identification of that property with God's omniscience. And so does C 1, for the property in question is not a degreed

---

[1] Interesting discussions of these distinctions and claims are to be found in Mann's earlier piece, 'The Divine Attributes', *The American Philosophical Quarterly* XII (1975), pp. 151–9.

property. But, it could be maintained, it is a sort of determinate of a determinable property – knowledge, or being knowledgeable – which is degreed. Accordingly, C1 could give way to some C2, a principle which, employing this distinction, would allow the identification of God's knowledge about Mann with his omniscience. Here, things begin to get a bit complicated, for then the principle will look something like this:

> C2 – Property instances *the F-ness of x* and *the G-ness of y* are identical if and only if:
>> (1) the property *being F* is necessarily coextensive with the property *being G*;
>> or   (2) at least one of these properties is a degreed property with an intrinsic maximum, and that maximal degree is necessarily coextensive with either (a) the other property, or (b) the intrinsic maximum of the other property;
>> or   (3) at least one of the properties is a determinate of a determinable, which itself either (a) is necessarily coextensive with either (i) the other property, or (ii) an intrinsic maximum of the other property, or (iii) a determinable of which the other property is a determinate, or (iv) an intrinsic maximum of a determinable of which the other property is a determinate, or (b) has an intrinsic maximum which is necessarily coextensive with either (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv) above;
>> and   (4) $x = y$.

And, as if this were not enough, at least one further complication would have to be taken into account by any successful formulation of such a principle for property instance identity.

Consider the property of existing necessarily *a se*. No created being could possibly have this property. Now consider the properties of being self-identical, of being such that $2 + 2 = 4$, and finally, of having some property. These are all properties had by all created beings. And surely they are necessarily such as to be had by any being whatsoever. But suppose God has them. On the property instance view of simplicity, God's instantiation of each of them must be identical with his exemplification of each of his other properties, including that of existing necessarily *a se*. None of these properties is a degreed property with an intrinsic maximum. Nor is any a determinate of a determinable. So God's instantiations of them can be identical on C, C1 and C2 only if the properties involved are all necessarily co-extensive. But since no creature exists necessarily *a se*, they are not all necessarily coextensive. If God can have a property only if his instantiation of it is identical with all his other property instances, then C, C1 and C2 all force us to conclude that God is not self-identical, not such that $2 + 2 = 4$, and not such as to have any properties. But this is absurd. So presumably, our principle for property instance identity will have to be complicated further.

And it may seem that a further version, C3, could easily be constructed along the lines of C1 and C2 to allow God to have such trivial properties and to provide for their instantiation in his case to be identical with all his other property instances. However, supposing for a moment that this could be done with any initial plausibility at all, the resulting sort of principle would share with C2 some consequences which should be far from attractive to Mann or any other defender of simplicity. First of all, on any version of the principle from C2 on, it will not follow from the identity of all divine property instances that God has but one property. Yet this seems to be a claim every defender of simplicity has wanted to retain. And it is a claim to which Mann seems strongly committed, in spite of its modally untoward implications. At first, it might be thought that this diversity among divine properties recognized by C2 on would, if embraced, allow a defender of simplicity to avoid any problem of modal uniformity with respect to God's properties. But of course, God's having a multiplicity of properties alone does not allow his properties to differ in modal status. And in fact the rest of the apparatus of Mann's theory precludes their so differing. Furthermore, affirming the additional identities any envisioned emendation of C2 would countenance leads to an even worse problem of modal uniformity. Then we would find ourselves forced to swallow a modal uniformity to the exemplifications of all properties whatsoever.

For consider any exemplification of an apparently accidental or contingent property. God will have the property of knowing this property to be exemplified. And this piece of knowledge will be identical to his omniscience. Thus, it will be essential to him. But if this is so, and God is a necessarily existing being, it will be a necessary truth that the original, apparently contingent property is exemplified, and that it is exemplified by the particular object which otherwise appeared accidentally to have it. It then follows of course that the actual world is the only possible world, that all our properties are essential, and so on. This is the extreme of modal uniformity.

In 'Simplicity and Immutability in God', Mann attempts to avoid a couple of broadly related problems by distinguishing between the content of God's omniscience and the activity by which he knows, and in a similar vein between the results of what he actually wills and the power or activity of his willing.[1] His claim is that anyone who holds a simplicity doctrine is free to maintain that the content of God's knowledge or the results of his willing could have been different from what they are without thereby being committed to the claim that the activity by which God knows and the power by which he wills could have been different. And if this is true, it will follow that the extreme modal uniformity problem can be avoided by the defender of simplicity.

First, it should be said in Mann's behalf that these surely are intelligible

---

[1] See pp. 272–6.

distinctions to draw. Furthermore, it is eminently reasonable to acknowledge that the contents of God's knowledge and the results of his willing could have been different from what they in fact are. But what we must ask is whether these distinctions can be employed to avoid the extreme problem of modal uniformity by anyone who holds a view of divine simplicity such as Mann's. I, for one, do not see how this is possible. For surely God has the property p of being such that his omniscience has the content that it as a matter of fact has (in the actual world). And on Mann's view of simplicity, as he has formulated it, it follows that God is identical with his instantiation of p and that it is identical with his instance of omniscience. How his omniscience could be what it is, and yet no instance of p exist, a property instance with which his activity of omniscience is supposed to be identical, is hard to understand. Indeed, given the most plausible position on the modal status of such metaphysical identities, the sort of divergence Mann envisions to be possible would in fact be logically impossible.

I have suggested that even if some version of a Mann-style principle of property instance identity could be formulated to allow God to have trivial properties as well as his distinctively divine attributes, and which would render their instances identical to his seemingly many instances of other properties, unacceptable consequences would follow. I now want to make the stronger claim that no such formulation will succeed in even its initial task. To see why, we must examine a problem, as yet unacknowledged, with C1 and C2.

Consider Mann's own power and his own knowledge. Surely, these are distinct property instances, for they can wax and wane somewhat independently of one another. But assuming that omnipotence and omniscience are necessarily coextensive, C1 and C2 as they stand entail that Mann's power is one and the same property instance as his knowledge. Likewise, C2 implies that his knowledge that Washington, D.C. is the capital of the U.S.A. is identical with his power to lift a single copy of the *Times* with ease. And this is clearly absurd. Among Mann's many features, these are obviously distinct.

The problem in both C1 and C2 is that the conditions laid out do not meet up to the full requirements of the biconditionality of their formulation. What are presented as severally necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for property instance identity clearly lack sufficiency. Any claim that *the F-ness of x* is identical with *the G-ness of y* must satisfy the general principle of the indiscernibility of identicals as well as such specific conditions as appear in Mann's original principle C and its descendants if it is to be an acceptable identity claim.[1] Mann's original principle can appear to give us a criterion

---

[1] The way in which the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals governs the acceptability of identity claims is sketched out in chapter 6 of my *Understanding Identity Statements*, Scots Philosophical Monographs, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984).

of property instance identity distinct from the generalized indiscernibility principles often known loosely as 'Leibniz's Law', and formalizable as:

$$(x)\ (y)\ (x = y \equiv (F)\ (Fx \equiv Fy)),$$

according to which, roughly, an object x is identical with an object y if and only if x has every property y has, and vice versa.

The conditions appearing in C1 and C2 may even enhance the illusion of independence from Leibniz's Law. What must be recognized, however, is that absurd results cannot be avoided unless the conditions laid out in C1 and C2 are seen as no more than partial explications of what is involved in the satisfaction of Leibniz's Law in the case of property instances. *The F-ness of x* cannot be identical with *the G-ness of y* unless every property exemplified by *the F-ness of x* is emplified by the *G-ness of y*, and vice versa. No descendant of C will succeed unless this is stated explicitly in its formulation.

And once we have such a general indiscernibility clause, rendering the right hand side of the principle's biconditional fully sufficient for identity, we shall have a principle which blocks Mann's power being identical with his knowledge, and so forth, but in addition one which blocks God's having any trivial properties. For consider again God's instance of aseity. It has the property of being an instance of a property had only by God. Now, on Mann's theory, God can have the property of being such that $2 + 2 = 4$ only if his instance of that trivial property is identical with, among other things, his aseity. But on Leibniz's Law, this is possible only if the former has the property of being an instance of a property had only by God. And since we all are such that $2 + 2 = 4$, this condition is not met. Therefore, God is not such that $2 + 2 = 4$, and by the same reasoning not self-identical, and not such as to have some property. We have this absurd result again, and this time due to a condition ineliminable from any acceptable formulation of a principle for property instance identity.

More generally, we have by parallel reasoning what we can call the problem of divine uniqueness: Leibniz's Law together with the basic elements of Mann's property instance view of divine simplicity will yield the result that God cannot have both (a) a property which is unique to him, and (b) a property shared by any other individual. For his instance of any property unique to him would itself have the property of being an instance of a property unique to God. And he can have a shared property, one not unique to him, on Mann's view only if his instance of that property would be identical with his instance of every other one of his properties, including in this case the instance of his unique property. But his instance of a shared property would not have the property of being an instance of a property unique to God, and so by Leibniz's Law could not be identical with an instance of a unique divine property. Thus, when the governance of Leibniz's Law becomes a recognized component in the property instance view of divine

simplicity, it follows that either (1) All of God's properties are shared, or (2) None of God's properties is shared. If God has an individual essence, or any properties distinctive of deity, (1) cannot be true. And if we can make any justified assertions about God at all, (2) cannot be true. Indeed, (2) is not even coherent except on a non-standard and extremely restricted view of what counts as a property. It is hard for me to see how an acceptance of either (1) or (2) could amount to anything other than a relinquishing of the substance of traditional theism. And neither has the least plausibility. So I conclude that no formulation of a property instance identity principle can function in a view of divine simplicity such as Mann's and be both free of patently absurd implications for individuals other than God (implications such as that Mann's power is identical with his knowledge) and free of such implications for God.

Of course, my argument for this conclusion depends crucially on acknowledging into our scheme of things such properties as those I have used as examples – such properties as knowing that Washington, D.C. is the capital of the U.S.A., having the power to lift the *Times*, existing *a se*, being such that $2 + 2 = 4$, being self-identical, and being such as to have some property. I suppose my conclusions could be resisted by denying that there are any such properties at all. But this seems to me almost too drastic a course to mention. For it would take quite a bit of argument to dislodge the sort of standard and powerful view of properties which countenances my examples. And neither Mann nor anyone else has succeeded in overturning this sort of view. So I think the foregoing arguments are secure.

It seems to me that the only plausible way to avoid the unacceptable problems I have delineated while still holding to a doctrine of divine simplicity would be to restrict the doctrine to apply only to *some* divine properties, abandoning the comprehensive formulation it usually receives. In light of the problem of modal uniformity, if God is held to have any essential properties at all, he cannot be held to be identical with any property instance which we have strong intuitive grounds to think exists only contingently. That is, no instance of a property which we independently judge to be contingently exemplified by God can be declared identical to him. No utterly comprehensive doctrine of divine simplicity, meant to apply to all God's properties, will avoid having modally unacceptable consequences. Likewise, in light of the problem of divine uniqueness, we cannot with any plausibility declare God to be identical with instances of both properties unique to him and properties he shares with others. Restrictions must be introduced here as well. I think this is a conclusion which is forced on us by what we have seen. The question we must then ask is how the doctrine of simplicity might be restricted to avoid these problems.

4. RESTRICTED SIMPLICITY AND DIVINE MODALITIES

The most obvious examples of properties God is traditionally thought to exemplify only contingently are such properties as that of creating this world, calling Abram out of Ur, and speaking to Moses. And these are all examples of what are commonly understood to be relational properties. In particular, they are all such that their exemplification entails the existence of some contingent being distinct from God.[1] The modal status of the non-divine relatum determines the modality of God's exemplification of any such relational property. If a doctrine of divine simplicity were formulated in such a way as to allow such properties to be exemplified contingently, any problem of modal uniformity might be avoided.

Now, of course, not all of God's relational properties are contingent. For presumably he bears relations to numbers, propositions, and the like which are as necessary as the relata involved. So a restriction of divine simplicity intended to avoid contingencies need not exclude all relational properties from its scope. The suggestion rather would be that God can be identified with his instantiation only of properties which are not contingently exemplified relational properties.

And it is arguable that not only will this class of relational properties need to be excluded from the doctrine of divine simplicity. For consider the property of intending to create some contingently existent physical reality or other. Most traditional theists would judge this to be a contingent property of God's. Yet it is not relational in the stipulated sense of entailing the existence of some particular contingent reality distinct from God. With such an example in mind, it looks as if someone like Mann should just specify that simplicity hold only with respect to properties we have some good grounds for judging not to be exemplified contingently by God, whether they be relational or non-relational. But of course the doctrine of simplicity cannot comprise all non-contingent properties of deity, as we have seen from the problem of divine uniqueness. The most plausible restriction which can be introduced to block this problem is to limit the doctrine to only those non-contingent properties of deity unique to God, such as, presumably, a-seity, omnipotence, omniscience, and the like. To put it somewhat picturesquely, we would then, with these restrictions, be conceiving of a simple core of deity underlying both God's shareable properties and whatever complex of contingent relations and states might be generated by divine intention and action.

On this restricted view, God would be identical with his mere having of omniscience and with his power of omnipotence, but not with his knowledge

---

[1] Problems with this distinction were alleged by La Croix, op. cit., but can easily be circumvented.

of Mann or his calling of Moses. Likewise, his omniscience would be identical with his omnipotence, which would be identical with his omnipresence, which would be the same as his aseity, which would be his necessary perfection. None of these would be held to be identical with his instance of any property he contingently exemplifies. And none would be identical with an instance of any property not unique to deity. And so, on this sort of formulation of a doctrine of divine simplicity, no problem of modal uniformity or of divine uniqueness would arise.

Mann could adopt such a restricted doctrine of simplicity to avoid the problems which seem to plague his comprehensive version. But the question which would have to be asked at this point would be why such a restricted doctrine should be adopted at all. Granted, it avoids problems attending the more comprehensive formulation Mann expounds, but what would be the positive motivation for subscribing to any such simplicity doctrine at all? We have already noted that sovereignty-aseity intuitions fail to motivate any property instance view of simplicity. What is just as important to note at this point is that the other motivation to which Mann appeals falls away as well in the case of the restricted sort of doctrine I have just sketched. For God's being identical only with instances of properties he intuitively is judged to have both uniquely and essentially or non-contingently will not entail his being timeless or his being absolutely immutable. Thus, the restricted version cannot serve the explanatory function with respect to these theistic claims that Mann wants of a simplicity doctrine.

Indeed, it is hard to see what reason we could have at all for adopting the sort of restricted property instance view of simplicity at which we have arrived by following Mann's lead. In many patristic and medieval texts, it appears that simplicity is affirmed so as to secure a sort of constancy among God's core property exemplifications. Metaphysical complexity is equated with a sort of composition admitting of decomposition and dissolution. Theists who viewed complexity in this way found themselves committed to affirming simplicity so as to deny the very possibility that any of the properties constitutive of deity be lost by the individual who is God. However, by getting sufficiently clear on modal matters relating to deity, we can see that this may be held to be precluded apart from any doctrine of divine simplicity.

As Nelson Pike and others have emphasized in recent years, there are numerous propositions about God which can be understood as necessary truths *de dicto*.[1] These are propositions concerning what we might call the defining attributes of deity. In an Anselmian vein, for example, there are numerous great-making properties which are requisites of deity. No individual

---

[1] See for example Pike's 'Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin', *The American Philosophical Quarterly* VI (July 1969), 208–16.

could 'count as' God without exemplifying them. They are in this sense necessary to deity.

Further, a strong classical conception of God will involve numerous necessities *de re*. The great-making properties requisite for deity which are exemplified by the individual who is God will be held to be exemplified by him essentially. He will be such that he cannot cease to have any of the defining attributes of deity and yet continue to exist. And further, one of the properties ascribed to God in this tradition is that of necessary existence. On this conception, the individual who is God cannot cease being God. Moreover, it could not have been the case that he not be God. Some philosophers recoil from attributing the modal status of necessity to God's existence and to at least one of the other defining attributes of deity – the property of being good as an agent. But even these philosophers are free to acknowledge another set of modalities to hold true of the defining attributes of deity – the modalities of *stability*, which I have delineated elsewhere.[1] Briefly, the stability of the defining attributes amounts to its not being possible that any individual who has them have begun to exemplify them, and not possible that he cease having them. If the defining or 'core' attributes of deity are stable, then it will not be possible that there be any sort of decomposition among them. What friends of simplicity have sought to secure will be secured.

And finally, it can even be held by a traditional theist that some of the requisites of deity, some of the great-making properties such as omnipotence, omniscience, necessary existence, and the like, are necessarily coextensive. In fact, as I have suggested earlier, this will be held by many theists who have no brief for simplicity. Thus it can he held that the unique, crowning attributes of deity cannot 'come apart' in any metaphysical sense at all, without any commitment being generated to a doctrine of simplicity.

With these modal matters in mind, I cannot see any clear motivation for adopting a restricted property instance view of simplicity whatsoever. The modalities of God's attributes provide for all that such a doctrine could reasonably be intended to provide. Now, I would not want to deny that the sort of sovereignty-aseity intuition discussed by Plantinga can act as a powerful motivation to consider seriously a property view of simplicity. For the relation between God and such abstract objects as properties is problematic. And there may be ways to circumvent the well known, apparently decisive objections to such a view, although I cannot think of any which are both clear and plausible. I do think the attempt made by Mann to circumvent these problems altogether by adverting to a property instance view of simplicity has not achieved what he intended. The only version of

---

[1] I have discussed the modalities of stability in 'Properties, Modalities, and God', *The Philosophical Review* (January 1984), pp. 35–55.

Mann's view which can be defended as at all plausible is such that no apparent reason exists to adopt it as a distinctive doctrine about the nature of God at all. Rather than having a significant amount of explanatory virtue as part of an overall theory of God's nature, it appears to be altogether superfluous, offering us no assurances about deity that cannot otherwise, and more straightforwardly, be had.