

A Response to a Plethora of Problems for Classical Theism

Introduction

Joe Schmid¹ wrote a blog post titled, “[A Plethora of Prima Facie Problems for Classical Theism](#).” He explains the post is not a “decisive refutation” of classical theism, but rather a brief look at a number of “at first glance” problems. I’ve invited several classical theists to respond to each of the problems succinctly. In what follows, they will show why these *apparent problems* do not amount to *real inconsistencies* within the classical theist paradigm.

I follow Schmid’s titles for each of the problems where I also indicate the responding author by last name. I asked the authors to list resources for further investigation into each problem; they can be found at the end of each response.

About the Authors

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Problem 1: Absolute simplicity and Theistic Conceptualism (Juliano)

With problem 1, it seems there is room to deny a couple of premises here. Firstly, as the author is well aware, the classical theist could deny that God's thoughts/ideas are propositional. Even if we were to swap out knowledge of propositions for knowledge of universal forms/patterns, the classical theist need not think that the multiplicity of forms entails that there is a one to one correspondence between propositions/forms and God's act of thinking them/knowing them. For Aquinas, God knows/thinks all things by "one intuition."² So that God knowing a plurality of ideas/concepts does not entail a plurality of thoughts within God's mind. As Michelle Panchuk notes, "...[God] has no need to 'divide' up divine knowledge into concept-size bits."³ Thus, the classical theist could plausibly deny premise 1.

Further, it is not entirely clear to me that the classical theist couldn't also deny premise 7. In drawing on the work of Gregory Doolan, Matthew Levering notes that there can be a multiplicity of divine ideas in a certain sense.⁴ Levering (a la Doolan) draws the distinction between logical and ontological multiplicity. For Levering, that there is a multiplicity of divine ideas can be chalked up to logical multiplicity without entailing ontological multiplicity within the being of God.⁵ So, if the multiplicity of divine ideas is understood to be a logical multiplicity, this would not entail that the divine ideas would be absolutely identical (i.e. without any sort of distinction). Yet the consequent of premise 7 (that God is not simple) would not follow because the logical multiplicity of divine ideas would not entail an ontological multiplicity within God. Thus, the classical theist has potential grounds for rejecting premise 7 as well.

For works dealing (either in part or in whole) with the problem of the multiplicity of divine ideas and divine simplicity and/or notions of God's non-propositional knowledge, see:

Gregory Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and*

² SCG I.58

³ Michelle Panchuk, "The Simplicity of Divine Ideas," *Religious Studies*, (Forthcoming), 22

⁴ Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 56

⁵ Ibid.

Good Creator (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017) (specifically, chapter 1)

Michelle Panchuk, “The Simplicity of Divine Ideas,” *Religious Studies*, (Forthcoming).

William Alston, “Does God Have Beliefs?,” *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 287–306.

Problem 2: Absolute simplicity and Trinitarianism (Chutikorn)

To address this argument, I will respond briefly to each premise and demonstrate one way a classical theist could maintain absolute simplicity and trinitarianism.

(1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are either distinct or not.

It is a teaching of Christianity that the persons of the Trinity are distinct. However, it is imperative to point out that this cannot be an *absolute* distinction (one of essence) since this would entail the heresy of tritheism, which is repugnant to Christianity. According to Aquinas, the persons of the Trinity are *relatively* distinct. In other words, they are distinct according to *relative opposition*. What this means is that the principle of distinction amongst the persons is origin which entails a real opposition between each person as to where they come from within the interior (*ad intra*) operations of God himself. The Father is distinct from the Son insofar as he is the principle (the generator) of the trinitarian processions, the Son is distinct from the Father insofar as he proceeds by way of intellect from the Father as knowledge of himself, and the Holy Spirit is distinct from both Father and Son insofar as he proceeds from both by way of will as love.

(2) If they are not distinct, then they are identical.

This premise is ambiguous and does not capture the different kinds of “distinction” and “identity” used to explain a real distinction of persons in the Trinity. Flowing from my explanation in response to premise 1, one can see that a) the persons are not *absolutely* distinct and thus are identical in essence, and b) that they are *relatively* distinct and thus not identical with respect to origin.

(3) If they are identical, then there are not three persons in one God but rather one person – in which case, Christianity (according to which Trinitarianism is essential) is false.

This antecedent is ambiguous since being identical in essence does not necessitate that the persons are identical with regard to where they proceed from. Being that each divine procession is a real one (truly proceeding from intellect and will), there exists unique *re relativa* which are really distinct in their terms while remaining one in the divine essence. In fact, it is precisely because of absolute divine simplicity that the divine relations are three distinct modes of subsistence since any relations in a simple God cannot be

accidental. Each of the persons (or subsistent modes) are of the same nature but can still differ (without contradiction) in their origin within the order of eternal processions.

(4) If they are distinct, then they possess distinct attributes – in which case, God is not absolutely simple.

Since the divine relations are subsistent, those relations just are the divine essence. That is to say, the divine essence and the divine persons differ only in their mode of intelligibility – there is a logical distinction between persons and essence, while there is a real distinction between the subsisting persons. Now, one might think the Father possesses the unique attribute of "being the generator" and the Son possesses the unique attribute of "being filiated" and so argue that the antecedent of the premise is true. However, the trinitarian monotheist can deny that such "attributes" are constitutive of the *nature* of the Father and Son. They are not additional attributes of the divine essence, like omnipotence, omniscience, etc., but rather they are unique relational properties that can be constitutive of the persons without being constitutive of their shared divine nature.

(5) So, either Christianity is false, or ADS is false.

As I have shown, this conclusion can be avoided. With the proper terminology of the immanent divine operations (of intellect and will) and consideration of the necessity of subsistent relations in light of God's absolute simplicity, classical theists can consistently affirm trinitarian monotheism.

For more reading on this topic, consult the following works:

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, qq. 27-42.

Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Thomas Joseph White, "Divine Simplicity and the Holy Trinity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 1 (2016): pp. 66-93.

Problem 3: Absolute simplicity and Christ (DeRosa)

When responding to apparent problems related to revealed mysteries, the classical theist need not provide a penetrating analysis of the mystery. As the source of warrant for Christian mysteries is divine revelation, one affirms such mysteries as the Incarnation and Trinity on the basis of divine authority.⁶ So, in responding to critiques of such mysteries, our goal can be modest: explain *a* way to understand the mystery that does not amount to logical contradiction. In what follows, I present one such way of doing this.

Schmid says, “It seems reasonably clear that Christ’s divine nature meets conditions (i) and (ii) with respect to Christ himself . . . So, the divine nature is a (metaphysical) part of Christ.” Schmid concludes that this leads to multiple problems for Thomistic divine simplicity. Yet, these problems can be avoided if the divine nature is *not* a part of Christ. Let’s explore that briefly.

Ambiguity arises regarding what “Christ” refers to. Prior to the Incarnation, we can speak of “the Son” or “the second person of the Trinity” as a divine person. Now, this does *not* entail that there are two really distinct things: 1) the Son and 2) his nature. Rather, “the Son” refers to one reality: a divine person. After the Incarnation, we can speak of “Christ” and “the Son” interchangeably as subjects of various sentences. Here, “Christ” refers to the divine person *that has assumed a human nature*. It makes sense to say, “Christ is human” and, “Christ is divine” since “Christ” is the divine person possessing a human nature in virtue of which both sentences are true.

Schmid says, “Christ himself is not completely and utterly identical to the divine nature. After all, Christ is truly human, whereas the divine nature is not human.” Based on what I explained, we can deny this. “Christ himself” refers to the divine person that assumed a human nature, and so “Christ himself” *is* identical to the divine nature in the sense that all of the divine persons are identical to the divine nature. It’s just that “Christ himself” *also* possesses a human nature.

On this model, the divine nature does not meet the conditions that would make it a part of Christ. Since this is *a way* of viewing the Incarnation such that the divine nature is *not* a part of Christ, classical theists need not commit to the problematic consequences Schmid deduces.

For further reading on this subject, I recommend two works: *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* by Brian Davies (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 1992), 297-319. *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* by Timothy Pawl (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶ For Catholic Christians, we believe the mysteries on the basis of divine authority which is also extended to ecclesiastical authority when God aids the Church to proclaim truths through conciliar and papal statements.

Problem 4: Presentism and Pure Act (Stanislaw)

Problem 4 contains two problematic conclusions concerning God as Pure Act: (4) If God's knowledge changes, then God isn't purely actual; (5) If some times are not actual, then God isn't purely actual. These conclusions result from the following premises:

(1) If some times are not actual, then for some x, the proposition <x is actual> genuinely changes in truth value.

(2) God knows all true (knowable) propositions.

(3) If <x is actual> genuinely changes in truth value, and if God knows all true (knowable) propositions, then God's knowledge changes.

The easiest and most straightforward response is to reject (2) as is given its ambiguity and to modify it, because while God knows all true propositions, he knows them according to *his* mode of knowing, not ours. What is missing is the qualification of the premise accordingly: (2)* God knows all true (knowable) propositions tenselessly in his eternity. Once we've modified (2) and replaced it with (2)*, (3) is false, because while it is true that <x is actual> genuinely changes in truth value, and that God knows all true (knowable) propositions tenselessly in his eternity, it is false that God's knowledge changes. Here, then, our two problematic conclusions, (4) and (5), no longer follow, as God's knowledge does not change and some times can be unactualized in themselves without worry that God will no longer be Pure Act.

The justification provided for (4) is acceptable enough if we are talking about human knowers, but even if knowledge essentially involves the intrinsic features listed and God did indeed possess them, we needn't accept that these features change within God, for if each feature is possessed eternally, then they, along with God, would remain unchanging.

As is often the case, the problem begins at the outset due to an error and allowing it to infect the entire argument. In this instance, the error is taking God to be a knower in the same sense that human knowers are, and articulating divine knowledge and time after our manner of speaking without important qualifications. As Aquinas wisely notes, "The difficulty in this matter arises from the fact that we can describe the divine knowledge only after the manner of our own..." (*De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 12).

For more on this topic, see:

Shanley, Brian J. "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (1997): 197-224.

Problem 5: Knowledge of Contingents and Pure Act (Juliano)

The potential issue with problem 5 is the conception of knowledge that is employed therein. The argument seems to assume that knowledge (even for God) entails a passivity in the knower. While it is generally true that intrinsic features of the knower—in at least some way—depend on that which is known (e.g. as is the case with human persons), such a view of knowledge necessitates that at least some intrinsic feature of the knower has the potency to be affected by what is known. This sort of potency would be classified as “Passive potency.”⁷ But such a mode of knowing is not the mode by which God knows things.

Proponents of the view that God is *actus purus* would hold that God’s act of knowing does not involve the realization of some passive potency within God. In fact, God as *actus purus* cannot have any passive potency. But if the contingency of God’s knowledge would not entail some passive potency in God, then it would not be the case that some intrinsic feature of God could have been otherwise.⁸ But how are we to understand the mode of God’s knowledge? The Thomist need not hold to a view of God’s knowledge that would introduce some passive potency within God. One reason for this would be that God’s knowledge is something that is active rather than passive.

For example, Aquinas holds that God’s knowledge is causative.⁹ And, as John Wright notes in characterizing Aquinas’s position, “...the divine intelligible goodness as actually being communicated to another is at once both God’s causality of that other and His knowledge of it. His knowledge is causative and his causality cognitive. He ‘knows things into being.’ In causing them to be, He knows them.”¹⁰ Thus, God’s knowledge must be understood as (or at least like) an exercise of God’s active power/potency. But that God’s active power/potency is not fully realized *and/or* might have been realized in other ways does not risk introducing passive potency in God.¹¹

In a similar way, that God’s knowledge could have been otherwise does *not* entail (at least for

⁷ See Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, 39 for the distinction on active/passive potency.

⁸ As Stanislaw notes in his reply to argument 4, this is, of course, assuming that God does possess such intrinsic features as described within the original post.

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ST I. 14. 8

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John H. Wright, “Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom: The God Who Dialogues,” *Theological Studies* 38, no. 3 (1977) 453.

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See, for example, ST I. 25. 2. ad2.

God) that God has some passive potency.¹² Hence, if God's knowledge ought to be understood as (or at least like) an active power, then the contingency of God's knowledge would not entail some passive potency in God. And since, as was stated above, God's intrinsic features could only be otherwise if the contingency of God's knowledge would entail some passive potency in God, then the fact that God's knowledge is at least something like an active power would not entail that God's intrinsic features could have been otherwise. Thus it is not the case that if God's knowledge would have been different, then some intrinsic feature of God would have been different. Therefore, premise 4 ought to be rejected.

Further, just to say a bit in response to the author's defense of premise 4 (which is actually offered in problem 4), the problem with God's changing knowledge does not lie *merely* in the fact that God could have known otherwise. Rather, I would assert that for God's knowledge to change precisely in the way that Feser describes is problematic insofar as such fluctuating knowledge presupposes that God has a real relationship with creatures and, hence, God has some passive potency.¹³ Such a relationship cannot be had if God is pure act. Thus, that God's knowledge could have been otherwise tout court does not risk undermining God's status as *actus purus*.

While this has only been a brief sketch of a Thomistic rationale for denying premise 4, there are other such examples. See, for example, Grant, W. Matthews. "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing." *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2012): 254-274.

¹² By stating that God's knowledge could have been otherwise, I am speaking about God's knowledge of particular truths other than God's own self. For instance, God knows that in this possible world I ate cereal for breakfast, whereas in another possible world I very well could not have eaten cereal for breakfast. But regardless of the possible world, God knows all things in God's self (see ST I.14.5).

¹³ To examine the passage of Feser referenced, see Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, 200.

Problem 6: Difference Principle (Nemes)

In experience we notice the reoccurrence of certain things in nature. If this happens often enough, we can begin to think that we have come across some genuinely universal attribute of nature as such. At this point, we think not only that this attribute characterizes all of our past and present experiences of beings, but that it characterizes all possible experiences of beings as such. Sometimes this is true, but other times it is not. For some time Europeans believed that all swans are white, but later black swans were discovered in newfound Australia. What happened was that people forgot or were otherwise unaware of the intrinsically relative and perspectival nature of experience. Of course this does not mean that it is never actually possible to attain to the intuition of a genuine universal, but only that the process of eidetic intuition (as it is called) is fallible and subject to correction. For this reason, it is important to pay close attention to the origins of our knowledge and ideas — not because certain origins necessarily undermine or compromise their truth, but because such an inquiry can help us to gain a clearer understanding of the limits of our knowledge.

This insight can be helpfully applied to the question of the nature of divine causality on a classical theistic scheme. If God is absolutely simple as classical theism affirms, then He cannot be understood in the same way as finite beings. One thing we learn about finite beings in our experience is that they operate as causes by taking on various accidental modifications of their being. For example, Pat Metheny plays the guitar in virtue of various movements of his body and acts of will, from which he is distinct. Moreover, he produces different sounds as he plays because the position of his body is different in each case. This is called the “difference principle.” A difference in effect presupposes a difference in the cause. But because God is not a finite being like Pat Metheny, because He has no accidents and cannot be accidentally modified, He cannot be understood to function as a cause in that way. The “creaturely” concept of causation is no longer applicable. A different understanding must be developed, one which is appropriate for its object. And if classical theism is true, then God must be capable of acting as a cause apart from any accidental modification of His being. And if He can be a cause of something contingent, it must be possible for Him to produce His effect (or not) without sustaining any intrinsic change. So the “difference principle” cannot apply to Him.

See Steven Nemes, “Divine simplicity does not entail modal collapse,” in Carlos Federico Calvet da Silveira and Alin Tat, eds., *Roses and Reasons: Philosophical Essays* (București: Eikon, 2020), 101-120.

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Problem 7: Existential Inertia (DeRosa)

The logical form of this problem is as follows:

- (1) If X is true, then Y is true and Z is false.
- (2) We don't have adequate reasons for thinking both Y is true and Z is false.
- (3) So, we don't have adequate reasons for thinking X is true.

A parody might go like this:

- (1) If it is raining, then Bob is using an umbrella and not wearing a hat.
- (2) We don't have adequate reasons for thinking Bob is using an umbrella and not wearing a hat.
- (3) So, we don't have adequate reasons for thinking it is raining.

(3) does not follow from (1) and (2) since there could be *other grounds* for thinking it is raining apart from whether we have adequate reasons for thinking Bob is using an umbrella and not wearing a hat. Perhaps we *actually see* that it is raining outside, but have not seen or heard from Bob in days and cannot judge anything based on his attire.

Similarly, one can have other grounds for holding to classical theism independent of adequate reasons for thinking TST is true and EIT is false. One might hold to classical theism based on philosophical arguments that do not depend on the falsity of existential inertia. For example, one might endorse a contingency argument for an absolutely necessary being and then conclude that such a reality must be absolutely simple.

Or, one might hold that classical theism is the best explanation of a wide array of biblical data. Or, one might hold to classical theism based on ecclesiastical authority that one has come to trust. Or, one might hold belief in the God of classical theism is properly basic. Or, one might endorse classical theism based on a combination of those considerations. So, classical theists can point to the non-sequitur as a resolution to the apparent problem.

For further reading on this topic, one may consult:

Feser, E. (2011). Existential Inertia and the Five Ways. *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 85(2), 237-267. This article opposes the existential inertia thesis.

Oppy, G. (2019). On stage one of Feser's 'Aristotelian proof'. *Religious Studies*, published online by Cambridge University Press: 30 October, 2019. This article offers reasons for accepting the existential inertia thesis. Also, Schmid has a forthcoming journal article explaining arguments for existential inertia and against a divine sustenance view.

Problem 8: Presentism and Causal Sustenance (Tomaszewski)

It seems to me that there are actually two problems being presented here. The first one is the objection considered by Lombard, according to which God is where He was not before when new creatures come into existence, and therefore changes. The second one is Mullins' own objection from presentism to the conjunction of the claims that God is absolutely simple and that He conserves every being in existence every moment that it exists. As far as I can tell, these problems are distinct, and it's not clear to me why Mullins believes that the passage he quotes from Aquinas is supposed to be responsive to the problem considered by Lombard.

In reply to the first objection, considered by Lombard, it is sufficient to note that God's coming to be present in a creature constitutes a change in Him if and only if such presence is intrinsic to Him. But why should the Thomist (or anybody for that matter) believe that God's presence in His creatures is an intrinsic feature of Him? It is hard to determine a good test for intrinsicity, but arguably, a property is intrinsic only if (but not if) a subject could have that property without anything else existing. But clearly, *being present in one's creatures* is not a property God can have without anything else existing. I think this solution is in line with what Lombard would have said if he had given a fuller exposition of his solution.

The second objection, proposed by Mullins, insists that God "cannot act at non-existent times". It is of course perfectly true that God cannot act at non-existence times. Indeed, He cannot act at *any* time, because His act is His essence, and His essence is eternal. But God's conservation of His creatures in time is *an effect* of His intrinsic act. And Mullins gives us no reason to disbelieve what Aquinas says in *Summa contra Gentiles* II.35: "Nothing, therefore, prevents our saying that God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed at that time when, from all eternity, He ordained it." This, and not the passage quoted by Mullins, would be Aquinas' response to the objection given by Mullins.

For a different Thomist perspective according to which God's eternal action can be "simultaneous" with created times, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's "Eternity", *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 78, No. 8 (Aug., 1981), pp. 429-458.

Problem 9: Identity and Potency (Tomaszewski)

This argument is unsound because premise (6) is false. Here is premise (6): “If x can be such that (i) x is identical to y, or (ii) x is not identical to y, then x has (intrinsic) potencies.” And here is a counterexample to (6): Aquinas is such that he could have not been identical to the Angelic Doctor, and this would not require any intrinsic potencies in him (though, of course, Aquinas had intrinsic potencies). For what makes Aquinas identical to the Angelic Doctor is just the fact that we use “the Angelic Doctor” to refer to Aquinas, and that is a fact about *us*, not about Aquinas. Had the Church not bestowed this lofty sobriquet upon Aquinas, it would be false that Aquinas is identical to the Angelic Doctor. In neither scenario do we have any need to appeal to any of Aquinas’ intrinsic potencies.

Here is another counterexample: Venus is such that it could have not been identical to the Evening Star. But obviously, this does not posit any intrinsic potencies in the planet Venus. It merely posits an intrinsic potency in *us* to have given Venus a different name or no name at all.

The fundamental problem here is a confusion about identity. According to Aquinas and other scholastics, numerical identity is a purely logical relation (*ST* I.28.1 ad 2). That is, it is a relation arising between a thing and itself in our *mental consideration* of the thing alongside itself. In reality, there is no relation of numerical identity at all, and so the possibility of the relation obtaining or not obtaining between two (logical) things requires no real potencies in the thing itself.

For an important contemporary account of identity, identity statements, and all the thorny problems arising therefrom (including problems like the one raised here), see Saul Kripke’s landmark monograph *Naming and Necessity*.

Problem 10: Freedom and Potency (Nemes)

Apart from special revelation, human beings do not have very detailed access into the life and being of God. They can know that He is the cause of the existence of everything else, but they cannot know what He is in Himself, in nature and essence (John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith* I, 4). This point has to be kept in mind especially when anthropomorphic and personalistic language is used of God. In the absence of a special theological vocabulary, elaborated in some detail through God-given revelation, it will be necessary to specify the meaning of purely philosophical language about God in terms of causality. How then should one understand philosophical language about God's freedom?

The actual world exists contingently. It exists but it does not have to exist. Another world could have existed. One might say that the contingency of the actual world is grounded in the freedom of God to create it. But does this therefore mean that God possesses an unactualized potentiality to create another world (or no world at all)? Such an inference would be mistaken. In the first place, it assumes the difference principle, i.e. it assumes that a possible difference in the created world as effect must be grounded in a possible difference in God as cause.

But God is not subject to the difference principle. Rather than grounding the contingency of the world in some supposed divine freedom, understood by analogy with human freedom, it would be better to think of the "freedom" of God as cause in terms of the contingency of the world. For God to create the world "freely" means that another created order could have come into existence through God, even though God remains totally unchanged across all possible worlds. In other words, it means that God, such as He is in Himself, is not intrinsically or essentially ordered to the creation of this world or any world at all.

See Steven Nemes, "Divine simplicity does not entail modal collapse," in Carlos Federico Calvet da Silveira and Alin Tat, eds., *Roses and Reasons: Philosophical Essays* (București: Eikon, 2020), 101-120.

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Problem 11: Begotten Not Made (Chutikorn)

The term ‘begotten’ simply means something generated or even “fathered.” When the Nicene Creed utters the words “begotten, not made” it makes a clear distinction between something generated eternally as opposed to something generated in a created way. As I explained in response to Problem 2, the procession of the Son from the Father is one of **interior** operation (*opera ad intra*). The mode of generation of the Son is thus different from the mode of generation of things in the created order. That being said, while the Trinitarian processions are understood by faith, in order to understand this procession through the means of human reason, we must first think from what we can know *a posteriori*.

St. Thomas Aquinas often uses the example of intellectual generation in the human soul since this most closely approaches in likeness to God. Just as the soul by its act of thinking begets a word (as interiorly conceived), so too is there in God an interior expression of what he knows – an *emanatio intelligibilis*. But again, it is *because* of the absolute simplicity of God that his word is of his very essence, for in us, a word (even considered as an interior concept) is accidental. That is to say, the concept is not identical to our substance. In God, there can be no principle of potency or additional actuality received since God is pure act. To say that God does not have an eternal “Word” would be to say that God is entirely without knowledge, but just as God is eternal, his word must also be eternal.

It was said that:

(i) J and F are distinct, (ii) at least one of J or F is not identical to God simpliciter, and (iii) J and F are intrinsic to God.

Reply to (i): It is true that the Son and the Father are distinct, but *relatively* distinct as I explained in response to Problem 2.

Reply to (ii): This is not true. The Son and the Father are in fact identical to God *simpliciter* but not identical with respect to origin since the towardness of each person of the Trinity is derived from the very nature of intellect and will. Yet, there is nothing in the Son that is not in the Father and there is nothing in the Holy Spirit that is not in the Father or the Son. In the procession of the Word from the Father, for instance, all the divine attributes are communicated concomitantly as the divine essence is fully given to this subsistent relation by way of intellect. Likewise, the divine essence is communicated by the bringing forth of the Holy Spirit proceeding by way of the will, as from the mutual love between the Father and the Son.

Reply to (iii): The Son and the Father (and the Holy Spirit) are indeed intrinsic to God insofar as they are God, but only distinct inasmuch as they are personal modes of subsistence in God who proceed by way of intellect and will in the intra-Trinitarian life of God.

The relation of ontological posteriority of the Son to the Father cannot lead to an absolute distinction since relations do not constitute natures. *What* the persons are is the same, but *who* they are is different since each person either proceeds or is the principle of the processions but share the same essence and mutually indwell through their perichoresis.

For more reading on this topic:

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, qq. 27-42.

Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005)

Problem 12: Distinction Between Knowledge and Creative Activity (Stanislaw)

Responding to Problem 11 involves both the disambiguating of one premise and providing helpful clarifications that undermine the defense of the argument.

The Thomist rightly rejects 1, as God's knowledge is the cause or principle from which all things come to exist. However, even accepting premises 1-4, premise (5) is problematic because the term, "God's creative act," may signify in three separate ways: (i) the agent from which the act proceeds; (ii) the effect of the act itself; or (iii) the event as a whole without separating (i) and (ii). Premise (5) states that if knowledge is not identical to creating, then God's knowledge is not identical to God's creative act. Depending on whether (i), (ii), or (iii) are in mind, the premise is false, for while God's knowledge is not identical to the effect he produces or the entire event as a whole, his knowledge is indeed identical to himself qua agent or principle from which the act proceeds (just as heat is the agent or principle of heating), namely the divine essence itself. Here, premise (6) If God's knowledge is not identical to God's creative act, then ADS is false, only follows from (ii) or (iii), but not (i), and ADS is only committed to (i). Thus, the argument does not go through and ADS is safe.

The problem with the first defense of premise (1) has to do with accepting that a change in the world involves a change in God's essence, something the Thomist rejects. God, in knowing his essence, knows it not as static but, rather, in all its dynamic fullness of being and as imitable. God's knowledge of the variability of creatures, both possible and actual, does not entail a variability in himself nor an accrual of some new perfection via received knowledge.

Finally, where necessary truths are concerned, these truths known by God are no different than any other truths, and this problem once again surfaces by holding the view that God knows as human knowers do, again something the Thomist rejects. Whether necessary or contingent, God knows by knowing his own essence as imitable. It isn't clear why one ought to accept that a multiplicity of truths known by God entails a multiplicity of distinct features within him as if his thoughts were received and constitutive.

For more on the multiplicity of divine ideas and simplicity, and God's unmediated and direct knowledge, see:

Doolan, Gregory T. *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008.

Grant, W. Matthews. "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing." *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2012): 254-274.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about each of these topics, and Schmid explains he will explore them in the future. Nonetheless, we believe these responses suffice to show that the “plethora” of *apparent* problems for classical theism do not lead to *real inconsistencies*. Schmid notes, “Classical theism is a formidable, fruitful, and deeply intellectually respectable research program.” We agree. Moreover, we maintain that the God of classical theism exists and is worthy not just of the attention of researchers but of the worship of all human beings.