
Phil 417

Divine Simplicity

Time & Place: T 7-10, Hascall 202

Instructor: Nate Bulthuis

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Course Description

The classical theistic picture maintains that, among other things, God is a perfectly simple being, having no parts. But how best to understand this claim, and whether it is—or even could be—true, is contentious. This course will be devoted to an examination of the doctrine of divine simplicity. That doctrine has immediate implications for general issues in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language, and normative theory, and so the course will involve, in part, engagement with topics in many of those philosophical sub-disciplines. The roots of the doctrine of divine simplicity run as far back as the pre-Socratics, and active philosophical debate about the doctrine continues to this day. Consequently, central texts in the course will be drawn from throughout philosophical history. Familiarity with the general methods of analytic philosophy is strongly recommended.

Website

This course utilizes a website: philosophy.natebulthuis.com/simplicity. It is password-protected. The password for the site is **one**. Please consult the website for the schedule and access to readings, for essay prompts and other assignments, and for any other material provided during the semester.

Reading

You need to purchase the following books for this course, available at the Colgate bookstore:

Pegis, A. (tr.). 1991. *Aquinas: Summa contra gentiles*, Book 1: God. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press

Plantinga, A. 1980. *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press)

Williams, T. (tr.) 1996. *Anselm: Monologion and Proslogion* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company

Grading

Reading Responses (20 pts/response): A response to the week's reading(s), due end of day each Sunday.

Group Presentation (300 pts): A group presentation.

Term Paper (500 pts): A term paper covering a topic in the course. A rough draft will be due immediately before Thanksgiving break.

	Topic	Reading(s)
8/29	Philosophical and Historical Background	Weigel, 'Divine Simplicity'; Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i> [excerpts]; Augustine, <i>City of God</i> , XI.10
9/5	A Priorist Arguments	Anselm, <i>Monologion</i> , chs. 1-6, 15-28; Morris, 'Dependence and Divine Simplicity'
9/12	A Posteriorist Arguments	Aquinas, SCG I:10-13; MacDonald, 'Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument'
9/19	A Posteriorist Arguments	SCG I:14-18, 21-22, 28; Kretzmann, <i>The Metaphysics of Theism</i> , pp 84-95, 113-130
9/26	Plantinga on Simplicity	Plantinga, <i>Does God Have a Nature?</i> , pp. 1-61
10/3	Properties as Concrete Individuals	Mann, 'Divine Simplicity'; Morris, 'On God and Mann'; Mann, 'Simplicity and Properties'
10/17	Properties and Acts	Rogers and Rogers, 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity'
10/24	Varieties of Ontology	Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity'
10/31	Truthmaking	Brower, 'Making Sense of Divine Simplicity'
11/7	Negative Theology	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Divine Names</i> , chs. 1-2, 13; Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Mystical Theology</i> ; Maimonides, <i>A Guide for the Perplexed</i> , I.51-60
11/14	Analogy	Aquinas, SCG I:29-36; Knuuttila, 'Being qua Being in Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus'; Pruss, 'On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity,' §§ I-II
Week 12	Univocity	Scotus, 'Man's Natural Knowledge of God'; Burrell, 'Duns Scotus: The Univocity of Analogous Terms'
Week 13	Divine Free Will	Aquinas, SCG I: 63-71; Stump and Kretzmann, 'Absolute Simplicity'; O'Connor, 'Simplicity and Creation'
Week 14	Divine Contingent Knowledge	Aquinas, SCG I: 72-88; Grant, 'Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Knowing'