

St. Thomas Aquinas
Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard

Book I, Distinction 2, Question 1

Article 2: Whether there are multiple attributes in God*

The resolution of the second issue proceeds thusly. 1) It appears that in the divine essence there is not a plurality of attributes. For that is maximally one which is entirely withdrawn from plurality. For white is that which, according to the Philosopher, is not mixed with black. But the divine essence is supremely one, which is the principle of all unity. Therefore, no plurality of attributes may exist in it.

2) Further, the operation of a single simplicity is one. But the divine essence is one and simple. Therefore it has just one operation. But there are diverse operations of the diverse attributes, just as to know is of science and to desire is of the will, and similarly with others. Therefore, in God there is not a diversity of attributes.

But on the contrary, 1) Augustine says that all that is simply better to be than not to be, is to be attributed to God. But wisdom, goodness and the like are simply better to be than not to be. Therefore they are in God.

2) Further, all that which is said relatively, originates from that which is simply and absolutely. But we encounter certain things which are perfect [but] not absolutely, but according to their natures some are more and some are less. Therefore, there must be something which is perfect absolutely and simply, by which all other things are perfected. But, as the Philosopher states, that which is perfect simply is that in which there occur all the nobilities found in all the genera, and the Commentator says regarding this same text that this is God. Therefore in God there is found power, goodness, and whatever else which is of nobility in any thing whatsoever.

I answer that whatever there is of being and goodness in creatures, all of it is from the Creator: but imperfection is not from Him, but occurs on the part of the creature, insofar as it is from nothing. But that which is the cause of anything, has that [that which is caused] in a more excellent and noble way. Therefore, it is necessary that all the nobilities of all creatures be found in God in the most noble way and without any imperfection, and such that those [nobilities] which are diverse in creatures, are one in God due to [His] supreme simplicity. So, therefore, it should be said that in God there is wisdom, goodness, and the like, any of which is the divine essence itself, and thus all are one in reality. And because any of these is in God according to its most true concept, and the concept of wisdom is not the concept of goodness, insofar as they are of this sort, it remains that they are diverse in concept, not just on the part of the thinking [person] but from the property of the thing itself: and thence it is that He himself is not the cause of things in an entirely equivocal manner, since according to His form He produces similar effects, not univocally, but analogically; similarly from His wisdom all wisdom is derived, and so with the other attributes, according to the doctrine of Dionysius. And thus He himself is the exemplar form of things, not just regarding those [things] which are in His wisdom, i.e. according to ideal concepts, but also regarding those [things] which are in his own nature, i.e. attributes. But some say that these attributes do not differ except as pertaining to the things connoted in creatures, which cannot be the case. Since the cause does not have anything from its effect, but the other way around, therefore God is not said to be wise because

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wisdom is from Him, but rather a created thing is said to be wise insofar as it imitates the divine wisdom: for even if creatures did not exist from all eternity, and even if they were never to exist, it would nevertheless be true to say that [God] is wise, good and the like. Nor is it at all the case that the same thing is signified by the one and by the other, as a single thing is signified by synonymous terms.

1) To the first [argument] it should be responded that a plurality of attributes in no way prejudices supreme unity: because these [attributes] which are in other things as plural, are in Him as one thing, and plurality remains only according to concept, which is not opposed to supreme unity in reality, but is a necessary consequence of the same, if perfection is simultaneously present.

2) To the second [argument] it should be responded that the operation of God is His essence. Therefore just as His essence is one, so [His] operation is one in reality, but is pluralized by diverse concepts: and similarly in regards to the essence, which is permitted to be one, there are nevertheless considered to be in it multiple concepts of the attributes.