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BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem and Reasons for discussing Al-Ghazali and Thomas Aquinas on Divine Simplicity

It is widely accepted in both Christianity and Islam that these faiths are monotheistic. What does that mean? It is generally recognized that monotheistic thought refers to a conception of God as completely simple, namely, the doctrine of divine simplicity. However, if the simplicity of God in His being is simple and indivisible as Christianity and Islam declare, then the divine attributes warranted from the Bible and the Koran are called into question. How have Christian and Muslim theologians tackled the problem underlying the distinction between the One and the many? How do they approach the problem of God’s attributes in relation to God’s oneness? Both monotheistic traditions have a long history of attempting to explain the controversial issues concerning the centre problem of divine simplicity - the problem of predicking attributes of a transcendent being, a completely simple being. On the other hand, the problem of the One and the many that arises from the doctrine of divine simplicity is not merely indicated and implied by Christian and Islamic traditions, but it was also nominally a philosophic problem posed by the Greek philosophers.

The historical doctrinal development in Christianity and Islam shows that their approach towards the perception of God as unique and simple appears to be more or less influenced by the philosophical notion of the One. Similarly, the philosophical approach towards this question seems to be influenced by Christianity and Islam to a certain extent as well.

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2 I am deeply indebted to my thesis supervisors, Prof. dr. Henk Vroom (Faculty of Theology) and Prof. dr. Wouter Goris (Faculty of Philosophy) of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam for their suggestions, comments, and criticisms given in the development of this paper. This present study is a provisional plan for being one of the five chapters of a research project focusing on the Comparative Theology on the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity between Sunni Islam and Christianity in Malaysia.

3 In this study, when I speak of Christian belief, I am referring to what is common to the classical doctrine of God in the major branches of the Christian church, what unites the thinkers from the Christian church (1st to 11th century), Western and Roman Catholic (11th - 21st century) and Protestant Churches (16th – 21st century) — classical Christian belief, as we might call it. As I am not acquainted with the doctrines of another branch of the Christian church, namely the Eastern Orthodox (11th – 21st century), I will not include their thoughts when I speak of Christian belief.

4 When I speak of Islamic belief, I mean what is common to the classical doctrines of the two sects of Islam, what unites the thinkers from the Mu‘tazilites’ and Sunni traditions – classical Islamic belief, as we might call it; unless otherwise specified (note: although the history of Kalam (theology) began from Mu‘tazilites’ theology, after Asharite, Muta‘zilite’s theology is generally rejected by Sunni traditions due to their philosophical speculations).

5 In philosophical tradition, one may trace Classical theism’s concept of God as One in Plato’s Parmenides, Aristotle, Plotinus (Ancient Greek, Neo-Platonist) and Avicenna (or Ibn Sina, the Medieval Neo-Platonist). I will briefly survey ideas of the One in their canonical philosophic texts, particularly with emphasis in the context of Medieval Philosophy in Chapter II: Historical Location, Section 2.3. Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity was also influenced by Proclus, Liber de causis (the anonymous ‘Book of Causes’), Psuedo-Dionysius and Averroes (or Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198), but due to limitation of space, I have not been able to include them in this study.

6 For Muslim thinkers’ discussion on divine simplicity, see Chapter 2, section 2.3: Divine Simplicity before Al-Ghazali, and to Christian thinkers’ theories of a simple God, and section 2.4: Divine Simplicity before Aquinas.
This centre problem of divine simplicity has often been misconceived and misrepresented by both Muslims and Christians from within and without their traditions, and consequently, this problem triggers tension between the two faiths. As far as I am concerned, particularly in a Malaysian context, both Muslims and Christians have misconceptions about each other’s position, as well as differences and similarities on divine simplicity. Such misperceptions bring forth tension between the two traditions. For example, in Malaysia, historically the word “Allah” is used by both Muslims and Bumiputera Christians as a reference to God. However, recently the Malaysian Internal Security Ministry has announced that “Allah” is prohibited for use by publishers other than for Islamic materials. Apparently, this is due to the fact that the Muslims believe Christians worship the Triune God (‘God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit’) whereas there is ‘one and only God’ for the Muslims. Such controversy between Muslims and Christians in Malaysia is only the tip of the iceberg, generated due to lack of dialogue between the two traditions on divine simplicity. It also raises other underlying questions, such as, what does a Christian know about the Islamic perception of God? Similarly, what does the Muslim know about the Christian’s God? Does the Muslim consider Christian monotheism to be similar to his or her own? These questions show that there is indeed a need to study, or more precisely, ‘to dialogue’ on the doctrine of divine simplicity between these two faiths in order to clarify the theological differences and similarities between them and consequently to bridge an interfaith dialogue in a more constructive way.

For this very reason I have studied Al-Ghazali and Thomas Aquinas on divine simplicity. I am aware that the historical background on divine simplicity in Islam and Christianity is complicated and sophisticated. I chose to study the traditional thinkers of Christianity and Sunni Islam, particularly Al-Ghazali’s (A.D. 1058-1111) and Thomas

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7 “Bumiputera Christian” refers to the community of Christians who use the national language of Malaysia – Bahasa Malaysia – as medium of communication in the church. The Bahasa Malaysia term “Allah” is mentioned in the Malay Bible (printed in 1629, and 1731-1733), as well as in their liturgy, prayer, worship, sermons and religious education. In fact, the term “Allah” is used to describe both the Muslims’ and Christians’ God in Indonesia, Egypt, Lebanon, as well as the Arabian world.

8 Based on a circular issued on 5 December 1986 [ref: KKDN S.59/3/9/A.Klt.2], the Malaysian authorities (Home Ministry-Internal Security Department and The Quran Publication Control and Text Division) announced that it is prohibited for religions other than Islam in Malaysia to use “Allah” as a synonym for God. According to Malay Press (Berita Harian, dated 27 Feb, 2009), the Malaysian government had categorized the following usage of words and phrases exclusive to Islam: “Allah,” “Kaabah (Sacred building),” “Baitullah (House of God),” and “Solat (the formal prayer)” as words. Generally, there is a difference between the Muslims’ and Christians’ God, as such, “Allah” is to be used as a reference to God by the Muslim only in Malaysia. It is seen by the Malaysian authorities that the usage of “Allah” by non-Muslims is prejudicial to national security and may cause confusion among Muslims (although Malaysia is not officially an Islamic country, the Muslim population was 60.4 per cent in the 2000 census).


10 When I use the word “Sunni Islam” or “Islam” in the following pages, I am referring to the Sunni denomination of Islam, unless otherwise specified.
Aquinas’ (A.D. 1225-1274) perceptions of divine simplicity. Al-Ghazali is chosen certainly not because he is the only representative of Sunni Islam, but because he is undoubtedly the most influential theologian and religious-legal scholar in the history of Islamic thought, particularly in the largest and only Islamic denomination – Sunni Islam – in Malaysia. 11 On the other hand, Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican, is chosen because of he is one of the prominent Christian theologians from the medieval scholastic period (particularly in the thirteenth century of the High Scholastic Period). Although Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity cannot be labelled as the only Christian version of the doctrine of divine simplicity, it is more or less implied in the whole system of Christian doctrine of divine simplicity. Following his predecessors, such as Anselm (d.1109) and Peter Lombard (d.1160), Aquinas continues the discussions on the centre problem of predicating attributes of a transcendent being.

In this study, I am not attempting to claim that Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ divine simplicity represent their own traditions in some special way, and I am also not proposing that there is direct causal connection between their views. 12 As mentioned above, the reason I chose these two thinkers from widely divergent traditions and background is because their views on divine simplicity are more or less implied in the whole system of Islamic and Christian doctrine. From my point of view, their views on divine simplicity are fascinating, with substantial areas of similarity and difference that are able to help us to understand and clarify some of the issues between the Christians’ and Muslims’ understanding of divine simplicity. Consequently, the genuine interfaith dialogue could be a bridge between them. Therefore, it is the primary purpose of this research to study and present how Al-Ghazali and Aquinas deal with the problem of divine simplicity and classify the differences and commonalities in their argumentations and insights. I now turn to presenting the motive of having interfaith dialogue in a more detailed way.

1.2 Interfaith Dialogue Motive
This study ought to be read as containing interreligious perspectives in a comparative study of philosophical theology, a discipline that attempts to take an action of dialogue between two traditions on divine simplicity through the dialogue between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas on divine simplicity. It was impossible for Al-Ghazali and Aquinas to dialogue on this important doctrine as they were from different time periods. It should be noted that this present comparative study is only a study of the historical background of the Islamic and

11 Sunni Islam (also known as Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jammah) is the largest denomination, or more precisely, the only denomination in Malaysia (Sh’ia Muslims are prohibited from exercising their faith publicly in Malaysia).

Christian views of divine simplicity through Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ perception of divine simplicity, as they are fathers of the ideas in their traditions. This present study will serve as an introduction to the doctoral thesis in which I will further study the topic of divine simplicity and the issues involved in the context of Malaysian Christian and Islamic theology.

Moreover, today Muslims and Christians are deeply probing into the differences and similarities between their traditions, both in theological and philosophical discourses. Increasingly, the realities of inter-religious encounters also bring Muslim-Christian relations into an imperative task: interfaith dialogue. Such interfaith dialogue between Islam and Christianity has been carried on aggressively these past few decades, especially in my home country, Malaysia, with her multi-religious character. For example, when the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2004), the Malaysian Prime Minister in that meeting called for a concerted effort to initiate interfaith dialogue. Basically, there are two degrees of interfaith dialogue: (1) for clarifying what their beliefs are; and (2) for gaining a mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence. Based on my personal experience, I observe that the interfaith dialogue of clarifying what the beliefs of Muslims and Christians are is an essential motivation, as tension between these two belief systems often arises due to misunderstanding of their perceptions of God. In general, Christians and Muslims have disagreements with regard to their perceptions of God’s simplicity; they differ in how they understand the person (per se, or being) of God. In this research, it is not to allege that Christians and Muslims share a

13 According to a 2000 census reported in Department of Statistics Malaysia: Malaysia is a cultural pluralistic country, the Muslim population was 60.4 per cent (compared to 58.6 per cent in 1991). Notably, religions in Malaysia are tangled up with the politics of race. All Malay ethnic groups are Muslim, Malaysian Chinese tend to be Buddhist (19.2 per cent), and Malaysian Indians are Hindu (6.3 per cent). Uniquely, a number of Chinese and Indians are Christian (9.1 per cent).


16 As shown in Section 1.1, tension and confusion arise due to the usage of “Allah” by both Muslim and Christian communities in Malaysia. Besides, both religions have misconceptions of each other’s understandings of God. Thus, there is a need to have interfaith dialogue, for the sake of clarification.

17 According to Mohammed A. Abou Ridah and Alijola, Alhaj A.D, the Oneness/Unity of God (Tawhid) is undeniably a fundamental doctrine of the Islamic perception of God as neither begotten nor beget nor had any associates with Him in His Godhead. Thus, Islam is recognized as a monotheistic religion because of maintaining such perception of God. In addition, for Muslims, the profession of the unity of God became the only condition of salvation, as well as demonstrating a true Muslim’s belief and action (Mohammed A. Abou Ridah, “Monotheism in Islam: Interpretations and Social Manifestations,” in The Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity, ed. Hans Kochler (Wien, Austria: Wilhelm Braumuller, 1982), 41; see Alijola, Alhaj A.D. The Essence of Faith in Islam, (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publication Ldt., 1978). On the other hand, the Christian perception of God is that of Trinity: one substantia in three persona (Latin tradition) or three
common understanding of God; rather they intersect on one of the important philosophical-theological points of their fundamental concern, namely, the perception of God as simple One. After looking into the reason and motive of this study, I now turn to an overview of the research questions addressed in this study.

1.3 An Overview of Research Questions
In this study, I concentrate on the main question of how did Al-Ghazali and Aquinas deal with the problem of divine simplicity? With this in mind, this study is divided into five chapters: Chapter I provides a general introduction of the reason, motive, research questions, comparative problem, theological aspects and methodology involved in this topic. Sub-questions deriving from the main question are addressed in Chapters II-V. I here lay out the sub-questions that I seek to answer respectively in Chapters II-V:

In Chapter II, I briefly survey and identify the predecessors’ perceptions, both philosophers and theologians, of divine simplicity that shaped Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on divine simplicity, and I find out to what extent these predecessors had influenced the perception of divine simplicity in both thinkers. After exploring the historical location, then I attempt to explain Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ perceptions of divine simplicity, particularly in relation to the centre problem of predicking attributes of a simple God. If, as we shall see, Al-Ghazali often refers to divine attributes as neither identical nor different in being (esse or per se), does this mean that God has attributes? If God has attributes, then how does Al-Ghazali explain that divine attributes could possibly be referring to a simple

Hypostases in one essence (Greek Tertullianism), namely, the Father is God, the Son (Jesus Christ) is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God. The concept of God as Trinity is the heart of Christian doctrine, and many contemporary leading Christian theologians (e.g. Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), Etienne Gilson (1884-1978), Pope Benedict XVI, Karl Rahner, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), Louis Berholf (1873-1957), Karl Barth (1886-1968), Richard Muller, Catherine Mowry Lacugna, Stanley J. Grenz, Collin Hansen, Jurgen Moltmann, Robert Letham, Robert W. Jansen) continue to hold to this important doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity. In addition, Gijsbert van den Brink rightly points out that Scripture (New Testament) explicitly demonstrates the relationship of a Triune God, namely, “God who reveals, Jesus Christ is the revelation, and Holy Spirit is the process of how we receive the revelation.” (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, Class Notes in Dogmatic 1, November 2008). Also see the Christian’ Confession of the Triune God in Lumen Gentium [Dogmatic Constitution On the Church] in Documents of the II Vatican Council: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [accessed Jan-June 2009]; and “Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches” in: http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/institutional-issues/constitution-and-rules-as-adopted.html [accessed Jan-June 2009].

18 I will begin with a brief survey of certain key philosophic canonical texts on the One (i.e. Plato’s Parmenides, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, and Plotinus’ Ennead). Since the immediate context (the Ages of Medieval) of both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ and the thoughts of their fellow scholastic theologians and philosophers were found in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity, I will treat the most significant philosopher before Al-Ghazali and Aquinas, namely, Avicenna (or Ibn Sina). After considering this significant philosopher before Al-Ghazali and Aquinas, I will turn to address the respective scholastic theologians on divine simplicity before Al-Ghazali (i.e. Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi) and Aquinas (i.e. Peter Lombard and Aquinas’ teacher Albert the Great).

19 Throughout his works, Al-Ghazali uses esse (being) in this sense in his doctrine of divine simplicity (Tawhid) to explain the relationship of the divine essence and divine attributes, so that the divine unity or simplicity is safeguarded. See Chapter 3: Al-Ghazali on Divine Simplicity.
God? Or does this imply some other meaning? These questions are dealt with in Chapter III. On the other hand, Aquinas often identified divine attributes as being (esse or per se) without any composition. If this is the case, does this mean that God has no attributes at all? Or does this imply any other meaning? These questions are answered in Chapter IV. Certain theological aspects of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrines of divine simplicity will be examined as well, which enable us to unfold their perceptions of God more clearly. Finally, in Chapter V, a comparative study of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on divine simplicity is made. My primary focus in all shall be identification of specific differences and similarities in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ explanations and reflections on their perceptions of the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Notably, after presenting my proposed methodology in Section 1.6, an outline of inquiry which addresses the above mentioned sub-questions in a more detailed account is provided, as well as the methodology used in Chapters II-V. I now proceed to discuss the nature and problem involved in this study.

1.4 The Nature and Problems of Comparative Study in Two Faiths

As it remains a controversial question whether comparative study is possible from any religious tradition, particularly in the theological discourse between these two faiths, it is necessary to address the issue before I proceed. This question has both practical and academic implications. With regard to academic implications, there is a close historical connection between the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, especially in the medieval period, in which thinkers of those traditions discuss over matters of common philosophical concern. However, for a variety of reasons, such discussion among the three traditions has been scarce since. On the other hand, in the practical realm, David B. Burrell points out that for one who engages in comparative study, he or she should be aware of the danger of betraying their respective traditions. From my point of view, comparative study of two faiths is similar to a forum of inter-religious dialogue, in which Muslims and Christians must speak to each other, in order to understand and to maintain their own identity and so to contribute a mutual understanding between two traditions in one world, particularly in the diverse religious community in Malaysia.

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20 Aquinas uses “ens indivisum in se” [indivisible entity or quiddity in being itself] to describe a simple God in his doctrine of divine simplicity. Aquinas is in this sense explaining the relationship of the divine essence to divine attributes, and in relation to divine persona throughout his works (especially in his Summa Theologiae); so that both divine simplicity and Trinity are protected. See Chapter 4: Aquinas on Divine Simplicity.


24 I was raised in a multi-religious family in a multi-religious community in Malaysia.
“[i]nquiry has become more difficult because it is no longer possible to arrive at a conception of religious truth merely and simply in terms of one’s own cultural and religious traditions; acquaintance must also be made with living notions present in other traditions.”25 In other words, if one takes the uniqueness of each religion seriously, one must inquire of the conceptual in all religions for a specific religion, not within the context of a specific religion.26 This is why dialogue between two faiths is important but not sufficient.

As for this research, through the comparative study between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity, I attempt to display their similarities and differences, which serve as a bridge for Muslims and Christians to understand each other’s similarities and differences on divine simplicity. Consequently, this study will help create an interfaith dialogue between two traditions in Malaysia. In order to do so, it is necessary to lay down the list of theological aspects of both traditions on divine simplicity. To this I now turn.

1.5 Theological Aspects for Comparative Study

In order to have a proper dialogue between two thinkers from two faiths, it is important and necessary to display the comparable characteristics or theological aspects that include both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas’ ideas concerning divine simplicity. In this section, I draw several theological aspects, side by side, in order to present how Al-Ghazali and Aquinas tend to describe and account for their comparable characteristics in relation to divine simplicity. This indicates that both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ discussions on the doctrine of divine simplicity are built upon theological aspects that discuss the predication and identification of God’s existence and nature, such as “simple,” “necessity,” and other appropriate aspects which are comparable characteristics. On the other hand, although some theological aspects of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ discussions on divine simplicity belong to different categories, they are comparable. For example, “the uncreated Koran” is comparative with the “Word” – “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ.” Through charting the theological aspects listed below (see Table 1.1), we are able to have an idea of how theologians from two traditions discuss of divine simplicity.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theological Aspects</th>
<th>Al-Ghazali’s Divine Simplicity</th>
<th>Aquinas’s Divine Simplicity</th>
<th>The Comparable Aspects between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple and Necessary Being</td>
<td>Ghazali on Simplicity</td>
<td>Aquinas on Simplicity</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on Simplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental Concept</td>
<td>Ghazali on Transcendental Concept</td>
<td>Aquinas on Transcendental Concept</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on Transcendental Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Names and Attributes</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Uncreated Word</td>
<td>Ghazali on the Uncreated Koran</td>
<td>Aquinas on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on the Uncreated Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Persons/Trinity</td>
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<td>Aquinas on Divine Persons</td>
<td>Ghazali’s Divine Attributes and Aquinas’ view on Divine Persons</td>
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</table>

Although the doctrine of simplicity in both traditions entails more detail than the above listed theological aspects (for example, others divine simplicity’s popularity, such as discussions on immaterial, immutable, timeless, impeccable), I only focus on comparing the major issues within Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on divine simplicity. I now proceed to state the methodology used in each of the remaining chapters.

1.6 Methodology: Method in Science and Theology

This research aims to be interpreted as a comparative philosophical theology and with the close study of both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ texts in response to their analysis of the centre problem of divine simplicity, namely the attribution of characterized divine simplicity. The following steps serve as a framework in each chapter:

1. **Descriptions**
2. **Conceptual clarification and analysis**
3. **Comparison & Evaluation**

27 I am deeply indebted to my thesis supervisors, Prof. Vroom for his suggestions, insights, and comments given in the development of this comparative table. See also Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 112-140, 304-354.

1.7 Definition of Conceptual Terms
As Al-Ghazali and Aquinas are from different traditions, their usage of terms in their doctrine of divine simplicity is different as well. Thus, it is necessary to lay down their definition of terms before I proceed to study their view.

1.7.1 The Definition of Simplicity and Unity
The themes of simplicity and unity are sophisticated terms, yet necessary to be defined for understanding the doctrine of divine simplicity. In speaking of simplicity, the term can be defined as having an un-compounded or non-composite nature; or more precisely, without any composite parts, but the One. When philosophers and theologians think of and discuss simplicity, they normally referred to a simple God who is understood as being absolutely free of any and all composition, not merely physical, but also rational or logical composition. By unity we understand that God is undivided or indivisible, who is one in an absolute unity incapable of division, or more precisely, the absolute oneness. Therefore, unity of God indicates that there is only the One and only God is simple:

Simplicity = non-composite nature
Unity = indivisible nature

In other words, the doctrine of unity entails simplicity. Nevertheless, the understandings of simplicity are different in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrines of divine simplicity (see below).

1.7.2 Al-Ghazali’s Doctrine of Divine Simplicity:
In describing the simplicity of God, Al-Ghazali employs the traditional view of Islam, saying that the one (Al-Wahid) and unique (al-Ahad) God is an absolute unity who can neither be divided nor duplicated. The oneness entails that no part of it is itself a substance, as a point has no parts. 29 In contrast to Al-Farabi (A.D. 870-950) and Avicenna (A.D. 980-1037), 30 Al-Ghazali’s view of God’s uniqueness and His attributes is that He is an inseparable contingent being, yet claims that this does not harm the absolute unity of God. 31 Although Al-Ghazali in his famous Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut Al-Falasifah) rebukes the Muslim philosophers (particularly Al-Farabi and Avicenna), his arguments for “God is One,” “Divine attributes and essence,” and other related issues are basically built on philosophical grounds. 32 In addition, Al-Ghazali, in his The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of

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30 See Section 2.2 and 2.3: Like the Mu’tazilah, both Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina reject the divine attributes to be additional to the essence, and they believe this will necessitate plurality in the Necessary Being.
32 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. Al-Ghazali employs many philosophical notions to critique the consistency of philosophy with Islamic faith; as Majid Fakhry observes in his A History of Islamic Philosophy. Third Edition.
God, also indicated the most essential understanding of God to be Oneness in His divine names: the one (Al-Wahid) and unique (al-Ahad).

1.7.3 Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

Aquinas, similar to his predecessors such as Anselm (d.1109) and Peter Lombard (d.1160), has the same awareness of the centre problem: the predicating attributes of a transcendent being as central to the discussion of doctrine of divine simplicity. Aquinas in his Summa Theologiae and Summa Contra Gentiles addressed the concept of divine simplicity as the fundamental element in the understanding of God. In relation to God’s essence and attributes, Aquinas firmly demonstrated that God is truly and wholly simple. Although Aquinas had adopted a vast and highly philosophical elaboration in his examination of questions of divine existence and essence, he was pressed to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity did not render a composite God and that the distinctions between the persons were not a division of the essence. In his words, “there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute – namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity – but according to that which is relative” (Summa Theologiae 1, Question 28, Art. 3). Such understanding of God as a Simple God can be found not only in medieval theological texts, as it was also endorsed in Roman Catholic teaching (1567) and after the Reformation period (Belgic Confession, 1618, Art 1: The Only God).

1.7.4 The Concept of Transcendence in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

It is because of the problems of terminology occurs in this study, such as which conceptual of God are represented by both thinkers respectively? For this reason, I used the “transcendental concept” for representing both thinkers in their respective understanding of divine simplicity. This transcendental concept is not necessary identical between them, but is more or less derived from their works on divine simplicity, and also mainly being used for the purpose of this comparative study.


33 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names.
34 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names.
36 See Jean-Pierre Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas, The Person and His Work, Vol 1. Trans. Robert Royal (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 324-25: Aquinas has been proclaimed as Doctor of the Church in 15 April 1567 by Saint Pius V, a Dominican Pope; and also see (note 6).
1.8 An Outline of the Inquiry

In light of the above-mentioned methodological approach and theological aspects, I hereby structure my inquiry as follows and provide a detailed account of my inquiry in the following chapters. Its primary focus is to employ the category of comparative philosophical study by demonstrating how Al-Ghazali and Aquinas deal with the problems of divine simplicity, and by classifying their differences and commonalities in their argumentations and insights:

The primary purpose of this research is to study the following problems or sub-questions: What are Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ conceptions of divine simplicity? When they refer to the notions of *unitas Dei* (unity of God), *simplicitas Dei* (simplicity of God) and *unitas simplicitas* (a unity of simplicity), what do they mean? Does the notion of unity and simplicity exclude any mode of composition or a contingency? What are the similarities and differences found in Islam and Christianity from the preconceived philosophical notions of One?

The sub-questions concern the logical consistency of the very conception of a unique and simple God in Islam and Christianity. If God is a unique and simple being, what do terms like divine attributes and essence mean when Al-Ghazali and Aquinas use them to describe God’s being (*esse*)? Is it possible to reconcile their conceptions of divine simplicity with God’s other attributes – what is the relationship between divine attributes and essence/existence? Does such teaching contradict itself in both faiths? If God is a unique and simple God, how do Al-Ghazali and Aquinas characterize their God in both negative and positive ways? Or how can God be both known and unknown? If the language of divine simplicity is possible, what are the aspects of similarities and differences, as well as understandings to safeguard the Oneness of God for Al-Ghazali and Aquinas?

In order to answer the above questions, I take the following steps: *the Comparative Connection Points* between them.

First, I briefly survey the history of the doctrine of divine simplicity in their specific contexts and traditions in Chapter 2. I do not intend to write a complete history of the doctrine of divine simplicity before Al-Ghazali and Aquinas in this chapter; rather I aim to provide a systematic analysis of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views of divine simplicity. I present and analyze the historical accounts as far as they are relevant for the argument, with special emphasis on the period of Al-Ghazali and Aquinas (the medieval period). In Section 2.2, I especially examine and identify the perceptions of divine simplicity that are more or less characterized under almost the same philosophical scheme, namely the influences of Plato’s Parmenides, Aristotle, Ancient Greek Neo-Platonics (Plotinus), Medieval Neo-Platonics (Avicenna). Then, I explore Al-Ghazali and Aquinas immediate predecessors’ views on divine simplicity within their *kalam* (theological) and Christian traditions. For Al-Ghazali, I discuss two Muslim scholastic theologians: Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi in Section 2.3. For Aquinas, I discuss two Christian scholastic theologians: Peter Lombard and his teacher...
Albert the Great in Section 2.4. Although each version of divine simplicity from both selected philosophers and theologians is worthy of consideration, I will not discuss all of them in this present study, which serves as a MA thesis, as such inquiry would require a separate thesis. However, the brief historical survey of each predecessor (philosophers, Muslim and Christian theologians) addressed in this present study provides us the basic ideas we need for a systematic analysis of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Al-Ghazali and Aquinas.

Second, I move on to study Al-Ghazali’s view on divine simplicity in his selected works. I examine his conceptual meaning and content of God’s simplicity, and sort out their implications and problems in Chapter 3. I show that in his elaboration of the conceptual problems in relation to attributes of God, his arguments is correlated with his view on the relation between faith and reason, especially in his argument against to Al-Farabi’s and Avicenna’s views on the relation between divine simplicity and attribute of God. Third, in chapter 4, I shift into studying Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity. I discuss Aquinas’ understanding of divine simplicity from his selected works.

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38 This study only examines the English translation of Al-Ghazali’s major works as I am not acquainted with Arabic and Persian. Al-Ghazali’s major works in English are as follows: Al-Ghazali, Tahafut Al-Falasifah [Incoherence of the Philosophers]. Translated by Sabih Ahmad Kamali. (Pakistan: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963); Al-Ghazali, Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence. Book XXXV of The Revival of The Religious Sciences Ihya’ulum al-din. Translated with and introduction and notes by David B. Burrell (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2001); Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Beautiful Names of God. Translated with notes by David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1995); Al-Ghazali’s Al-Iqtisad in English translation; “Al-Ghazali’s Chapter on Divine Power in Al-Iqtisad” in Arabic Sciences and Philosophy. Vol.4. trans. Michael E. Marmura.(UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 296-315; Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates and Their Property, partially translated by Abdul-R-Rahman Abu Zayd, Reprint (Pakistan: Sh.Muhammad A Shraf Publishers, 1990), and “Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence: A Translation from the Iqtisad fi Al-I’tiqad with notes and commentary” by Dennis Morgan Davis Jr. (PhD diss., The University of Utah, 2005). All references to Al-Ghazali’s works are to these English translations unless mentioned otherwise.

nature of God’s simplicity in Aquinas’ works, and sort out their implications and problems of
attribution in God’s simplicity. Finally, I sort out the differences and similarities in Al-
Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views of divine simplicity. The approach of this comparative study
is located in between the fields of philosophical theology. For the purpose of further research,
at the end of the paper, I test the possibilities of deepening interfaith dialogue between
Christians and Muslim with regard to this topic.
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL LOCATION

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Medieval Philosophy and Classical Traditions of Islam and Christianity

Before I begin to examine Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on divine simplicity in chapters III & IV, it is first necessary to have an historical inquiry of the philosophical and theological considerations involved in the ascription of divine simplicity in both thinkers. This chapter is not an attempt to give a precise historical reconstruction of the notion of divine simplicity in Islam and Christianity, but rather to provide a brief survey of selected philosophers and theologians that had greatly influenced Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on divine simplicity.

Let me briefly provide the reasons why such investigation of the historical development of divine simplicity in both traditions is necessary, particularly Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ predecessors in the Medieval Period. First, in the philosophical tradition, one may trace classical theism’s concept of God as One in Plato’s Parmenides, Aristotle, Plotinus and Avicenna. In other words, the idea of being as One has long been probed in the history of philosophy, and their philosophical treatments of the One in relation to predicates of being (the question of One and many) more or less took shape in the doctrines of divine simplicity in Islam and Christianity. Second, as John Inglis rightly observes, in order to create a balanced historiography of medieval philosophy, one should cover each of these three great monotheistic traditions (Jewish, Christian and Islamic philosophies) within a single history of philosophy, particularly with their intellectual relations in the Medieval Period. The revival of Aristotelianism in Western Europe and the Arabic world by the end of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the result of the transmission of Aristotle’s works by Islamic philosophers (particularly Avicenna and Averroes).

In other words, scholastic theologians in both the monotheistic faiths attempted to integrate philosophy in formulating their perceptions of divine simplicity. Apparently, this implies that philosophical thought always implicitly and explicitly shaped Christian and Muslim theologians while formulating their dogmas. On the one hand, Christian theologians

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interpreted philosophical concepts using Biblical criteria of acceptability in order to formulate Christian dogmas. On the other hand, Muslim theologians interpreted the Koranic ideas of God according to the Islamic criteria of interpretation as used to develop the *kalam*.

**Third,** the dogmatic history of Islam and Christianity also clearly indicates that Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrines of divine simplicity are neither the foremost nor the only versions. Instead, many main predecessors had originated and developed the doctrine (particularly from scholastic theologians). In short, these predecessors (both philosophers and theologians) had greatly shaped Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on divine simplicity. Hence, we cannot demonstrate Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views on the doctrine of divine simplicity by studying the theological traditions but must also take the philosophical heritage into consideration as well. As such, it seems that it would be deficient for one to examine both thinkers without studying their predecessors.

### 2.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

In what follows, in Section 2.2, I first seek to investigate where the concept of divine simplicity originated and how philosophers before Al-Ghazali and Aquinas discussed and formulated it (i.e. Plato’s Parmenides, Aristotle, Plotinus and Avicenna). I then investigate the scholastic theologians preceding Al-Ghazali (i.e. Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi) in Section 2.3 and those preceding Aquinas (i.e. Peter Lombard and Albert the Great) in Section 2.4. Since the doctrine of divine simplicity is complicated and extremely rich, it is necessary to select the aspects or issues to be discussed at this point in order to give us an adequate idea of the nature and implications of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas doctrines of divine simplicity. As such, I have selected three issues to be discussed in each of the following sections. These three issues are the central problems of divine simplicity in relation to (i) the essence; (ii) creations; and (iii) divine attributes and names. These historical investigations will explore the baffling discussions of those philosophical and theological predecessors.

### 2.2 The Notion of The One in Plato’s Parmenides, Aristotle, Plotinus (Ancient Greek Neo-Platonism), and Avicenna (Medieval Arabic/Latin Neo-Platonism)

*Where does the concept of divine simplicity in Islam and Christianity originate? Can it really be said that Christian and Muslim thinkers derived this monotheism from the Greek tradition?* These questions have baffled many Muslim and Christian thinkers in their

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43 For Islamic *Kalam*, see Fakhry, *A History of Islamic*, 67-166, especially “The Interaction of Philosophy and Dogma”, 209-239: Fakhry observes that after Islam filtered (flirted?) with philosophical thought, many scholastic *mutakalimun* (theologians) from both the Muta’zilite’s and Ash’arites’ schools attempted to formulate their own versions of divine simplicity. For Christian Theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol 3, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 61: Muller observes that from the vantage point of Christian dogmatic history Aquinas’ Divine Simplicity often exemplifies only one position in the major medieval debate.

44 Concerning Al-Ghazali, I will discuss him further in Chapter 3; and Aquinas, I will discuss in Chapter 4.
exploration of the origins of divine simplicity. Given the long history of this discussion, it is by no means for me to answer this question precisely in this section. Indeed, a central problem of this section is not to inquire of the origin of divine simplicity, but rather to know how the philosophers understand the One and how the multiplicity of things can share in its own unity. It is my purpose in this section to provide a brief sketch of the concept of the One that has been discussed in selected philosophers. This would enable us to explore the continuity and discontinuity influencing these philosophers in the origin and development of divine simplicity in Islam and Christianity, particularly on Al-Ghazali and Aquinas. In the following, I investigate the notion of the One from the selected canonical texts of Plato’s *Parmenides*, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Plotinus’ *Ennead*, and Avicenna’s *The Metaphysic of The Healing* (*Al-Illahiyyat Al-Shifa*).

### 2.2.1 Plato’s *Parmenides*

I begin with Plato’s *Parmenides*. Frederick Copleston observes that in light of the history of philosophy, the notion of The One is first of all used to speak of a Being in Parmenides himself. In the discussion of Plato’s *Parmenides* (Hypothesis I-VIII), we find a first attempt to develop a doctrine of the properties of the One. For the Parmenides, The One can be defined as differently according to four hypotheses; and the Parmenides seems to be ambiguous in his conclusions to all hypotheses. The Parmenides does not affirm which “hypothesis” is his version of The One, but according to his hypothesis I and II, the Parmenides has posited similar versions of divine simplicity in which we shall find in the later Islamic and Christian thoughts – being is identical with itself, a simple One, a unity of One and many, and most importantly, the One is most indeterminate, as we will meet later. This led later Islamic and Christian philosophers to assert that all definitions of divine simplicity are a ‘footnote’ on the One. In other words, the Parmenides’ hypothesis I and II appear to fit into certain aspects of the doctrine of divine simplicity in both Islam and Christianity. From these two versions of the One in Plato’s Parmenides we can derive some observations..

According to the first hypothesis of the Parmenides, “if the One is absolutely one,” then “the One is in no sense many or a whole of parts.” The Parmenides further expounds...
that, because every part is part of a whole, and no part belong to a whole, if the One is absolutely One, then it will not be a whole, and will not have parts as well. In other words, the One is neither a whole nor parts. Since the One has no parts, it will have neither beginning nor end, the One is without limits. Besides, the One without parts also has no extension or shape, the One has nowhere, neither in itself nor in another. Furthermore, the understanding of the nature of “the One is absolutely one” can be summarized as follow:

1. the One is neither in motion nor at rest;
2. the One is not the same as, or different from, itself or another;
3. the One is not like, or unlike, itself or another;
4. the One is not equal, or unequal, to itself or to another;
5. the One cannot be, or become, older or younger, then, or of the same age as, itself or another, or be in time at all;
6. since it is not in time, the One in no sense “is,” and it cannot ever be named or in any way known.

With regard to the second hypothesis of the Parmenides, “if a One is,” then a “One must have being;” but this being is not identical to the One. Although ‘the One’ is not identical to ‘being,’ the Parmenides argues that both belong to the same thing, namely, ‘One which is.’ The Parmenides further explains that ‘One Being’ is ‘a whole’ or unity of ‘one’ and ‘being.’ In other words, for the Parmenides, “the One is one and has many parts; and these parts of the One Being are in its unity and its being.” Here, the Parmenides does not include the plurality in the One when the term ‘has many parts’ is applied. But such plurality is referred only to the different parts within the One. The Parmenides concludes that his terms of ‘One’ and ‘many’ are consistent in the following way: “that ‘a One which is’ is both one and many, whole and parts, limited as well as indefinitely numerous.”

I summarize the nature of ‘if a One is,’ according to his explanation from various discussions in the Parmenides’ hypothesis as follows: (i) the One must have being, but is not identical to being; (ii) the One Being is both one and many; (iii) a One will have a beginning, end, and middle, and it is not an eternity; (iv) a One must be both in itself and in another; (v) a

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53 Plato’s Parmenides, 136-137.
54 Plato’s Parmenides, 137.
55 Plato’s Parmenides, 138.
56 Plato’s Parmenides, 141-143.
57 See Plato’s Parmenides, 143.
58 Plato’s Parmenides, 136-137.
59 See Plato’s Parmenides, 146.
One must be both in motion and at rest;\(^61\) (vi) on the one hand, a One must be identical to itself and others; on the other hand, a One must be different from itself and others;\(^62\) (vii) a One is one, and has being; being, therefore, is neither out of being nor out of non-being.\(^63\) Thus, in the Parmenides’ hypothesis 1 and 2, we find a first attempt to express the intelligibility of being; being is identical with one and many, identical with itself and others, and unchangeable. I now turn to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

2.2.2 Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle takes up the notions of the One and being for defining the modes of unity and being One.\(^64\) He also states the meaning of ‘being as being itself or being *qua* being (ὅν ἡ ὅν),\(^65\)’ and lastly, something which should catch our attention is his One Unmoved Mover,\(^66\) the conception of God which significantly influenced subsequent philosophers as well as the theologians of Christianity and Islam. **First**, Aristotle identifies the various meanings of the One, in his words:

> ‘One’, then, has all these meanings—the naturally continuous and the whole, and the individual and the universal. And all these are one because in some cases the movement, in others the thought or the definition is indivisible.\(^67\)

To the one belong, as we indicated graphically in our distinction of the contraries, the same and the like and the equal, and to plurality belong the other and the unlike and the unequal... if the definition of its primary essence is one; e.g. equal straight lines are the same, and so are equal and equal-angled quadrilaterals; there are many such, but in these equality constitutes unity.\(^68\)

In the above passages, we can sum up that the One is not itself a separate being, but an indivisible being; the One must also be identified with the essence as well. **Second**, Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* Book IV, states that the meaning of ‘being as being itself or being *qua* being (ὅν ἡ ὅν),\(^69\)’ indicates that metaphysic science had to do with being. As such, he “investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own

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\(^60\) See Plato’s *Parmenides*, 148.
\(^61\) See Plato’s *Parmenides*, 150-151.
\(^62\) See Plato’s *Parmenides*, 157-162.
\(^63\) See Plato’s *Parmenides*, 185-192.
\(^67\) Aristotle, “*Metaphysics* x,” [accessed Jan-May, 2009].
\(^68\) Aristotle, “*Metaphysics* x,” [accessed Jan-May, 2009].
\(^69\) Aristotle, “*Metaphysics* iv,” [accessed Jan-May, 2009].
nature.” In other words, if I am not mistaken, Aristotle explains that the attributes of being are neither a living being nor a quantitative, but are “attributes which belong to it qua being [the being itself and its essential attributes as being].” To say something is, is also to refer to the primary One; therefore, the One is an essential attribute of being. Furthermore, Aristotle also indicates the difference between predications or attributes, or more precisely, the distinction between two types of predication: (1) predications as representing something being in itself (or independent being), or in his words, “unless it be because both are accidents of the same subject.” (2) The predications as representing something being attributable to a being (dependent being), in his words, “[if] both terms are accidental to something else.”

Third, for Aristotle, being is the impassible unmoved mover or unchangeable immaterial being. The One Unmoved Mover, being immaterial, cannot perform any physical action. For example, the primary substance has intelligence, and the One Unmoved Mover or God is his ‘thought thinking itself.’ God therefore must know Himself in an eternal act of consciousness. I shall now turn to Plotinus.

2.2.3 Plotinus’ Enneads

Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, is the first philosopher who takes up the Platonic idea of The One and further conceived, for his own metaphysics, of the One as God. Plotinus presents this idea of the One extensively in his work Enneads. For Plotinus, God is the transcendent One and simple: “the One, the source of all things, is simple.” In addition, Plotinus himself also says,

All that is not One is conserved by virtue of the One, and from the One derives its characteristic nature: if it had not attained such unity as is consistent with being made up of multiplicity we could not affirm its existence: if we are able to affirm the nature of single things, this is in virtue of the unity, the identity even, which each of them possesses.

From the above passage, Plotinus indicates that the One itself is entirely different because each one of the composite things owes to it both their unity and their being; but the One is not the One of those unities, but the cause of all participated unity. In other words, the One is not only simple to Plotinus, but it is also beyond and above human

75 Aristotle, “Metaphysics xii. 6, 7” in The Basic Works of Aristotle, 877-884.
79 Plotinus, Ennead v.3.15, [accessed Jan-May, 2009].
comprehensions, or more precisely, the One cannot be predicated by thought and attributes. In his *Ennead* iii.8.7: “On Nature, Contemplation and the One,” Plotinus brings out a twofold contemplation. Both depend upon differences in the modes of being of the subject and the object of knowledge. Plotinus writes, “All the forms of Authentic Existence spring from vision and are a vision.” The first contemplation is the ‘object to a knower;’ the other considers ‘the subject itself,’ and only the first is possible to be contemplated by the knower. In other words, Plotinus thinks that the thinking subject (knower) and the object of thought (known) are identical.

In *Ennead* iii.8.7, Plotinus further shows that the One is considered as the subject of everything. In his words, “Everything that springs from these Authentic Existences in their vision is an object of vision-manifest to sensation or to true knowledge or to surface-awareness” And by consequence One in its authenticity cannot be object of observation. In other words, for Plotinus, ‘subject’ or the One is a higher mode, is a simple and less unified being (‘not a being’) that cannot be contemplated by human knowledge. Besides, in *Ennead* vi.9.3, Plotinus observes that the nature of the One is difficult to define, and the same has to be said about the form or soul. Plotinus states that ‘what is simplicity or the One’ remains? different from the contemplation of knower and known, and therefore, is a result of the absolute simplicity of the One.

On the other hand, according to Plotinus, the attributes, such as The Good and The Intelligence, can be predicated to God. Plotinus points out that The One’s attributes, or more precisely, the multitude of coexisting beings of The One are only like The One; near/close to The One; become The One, but the One’s attributes do not become identical [emphasis added] to The One. Nevertheless, God is The Good, and this Goodness can be attributed to the One in the sense of not being attributed as an inhering quality. Plotinus also contends that the One or “partlessness” (Plotinus prefers to use the notion of “partless,” instead of “oneness”) is one and without parts, but Plotinus indicates that this is neither in

80 Plotinus, *Ennead* v.3.15, [accessed Jan-May, 2009].
85 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9: The Good or The One,” 77-78: “The One is not a being because it is precedent to all being….The One is without form…neither thing, nor quality, nor quantity, nor intelligence, nor soul. let no one object that something contingent is attributed to the One when we call it the first cause.”
86 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 73-88.
87 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 76.
89 Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 73-88.
90 Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 79-80.
91 Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 80-81.
92 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 80.
the sense of a “geometrical point” nor a “numerical unit.” Further, Plotinus argues that all the entities and multiplicity must emanate from the One, the self-sufficient and the perfect One. He writes, “it is entirely being that no part of it does not touch The One.” In sum, it seems to me that the One of Plotinus is the cause of everything and yet it is not identical to everything; Plotinus’ One is the being above all things, yet their being cannot be its own being; and the One is incomprehensible to Plotinus. Let us now turn to the one of the most significant philosophers who influenced Al-Ghazali and Aquinas in the Middle Ages, namely, Avicenna.

2.2.4 Avicenna’s The Metaphysic of The Healing, Al-Illahiyat Al-Shifa
I will now investigate the idea of divine simplicity in Avicenna (or Ibn Sina, 980-1037) through his work The Healing (The Metaphysic of The Healing, Al-Illahiyat Al-Shifa.) Although Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi also play pivot roles in the development of the One in the history of philosophy, in this comparative study, I will only discuss Al-Kindi’s and Al-Farabi’s understandings of the One in section 2.3, Divine Simplicity in Islamic Kalam before Al-Ghazali. No doubt, Avicenna’s works are pivotal in the history of philosophy and theology in both the Islamic and Christian traditions. As the key figure of Neo-Platonism in the Middle Ages, Avicenna’s philosophical thought represents the Neo-Platonic version of Aristotelianism and he indeed had become an interlocutor to Al-Ghazali and Aquinas. In the Middle Ages, Al-Ghazali and Aquinas considered Avicenna’ views on the existence, essence and attributes of the One as important philosophical elements for speaking of divine simplicity.

In his major philosophical work, The Healing, Avicenna examines and explores the idea of absolute existence and being, or Necessary Being due to itself (wajib al-wujud bi-dhatihi). For Avicenna, al-wujud serves as a primitive definition of the One. Avicenna speaks of the One as, “the Necessary Existent is one, nothing sharing with Him in His rank, and thus nothing other than Him is a necessary existent.” Here, Avicenna clearly demonstrates his idea of the One as absolutely unique. Avicenna explains, “He is the First” in

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93 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 80.
94 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 83-88.
95 See Plotinus, “Ennead vi.9.” 86.
97 For an excellent background and overview of Avicenna’s relationship to Neoplatonism, see Fakhry, A History of Islam, 132-166.
relation to what is other than Him. Besides, “The First has no quiddity other than His individual existence” because everything that has a quiddity other than existence is caused. The First is uncaused, therefore, has no quiddity (quidditas: mahiyah or essence). In his words, Avicenna argues that, “those things possessing quiddities have existence emanate on them from Him. He is pure existence with the condition of negating privation and all other description of Him.” Furthermore, Avicenna points out that the distinction of quiddity from necessary being entails composition, thus it cannot relate to the absolute simplicity of the divine. “The universal is predicated of all things, whereas pure existence [the One] is not predicated of anything that has addition.”

Additionally, Avicenna asserts that the First is without quiddity, without genus, without differentia, without definition, and most importantly, without composite. The following passage is worth noting as it explains Avicenna well, in his words:

The First also has no genus. This is because the First has no quiddity. That which has no quiddity has no genus, since genus is spoken of in answer to the question, “What is it?” and [moreover] genus in one is a part of a thing; and it has been ascertained that the First is not a composite…. the First has no differentia. Since He has neither genus nor differentia, He has no definition. There is no demonstration of Him, since there is no cause of Him. For this reason there is no “why” regarding Him, and you shall know that there is no “why-ness” for His act…The negation that follow it does not add [anything] to it above and beyond existence, except the relation of distinctiveness. This meaning does not include any realized thing after existence, nor is it a meaning of something in itself; but it is only in terms of relation.

As mentioned earlier, Avicenna not only holds that the necessary being (the One) is without quiddity, but also without genus. Again, Avicenna argues that since the First does not have a quiddity, it follows that it does not have a genus. Since the First has no genus, then it cannot be defined, as a definition requires a genus and differentia. Furthermore, in The Healing, Book Eight, Chapter 5, Avicenna explicitly concludes his discussion of the One by rejecting all possibility of comparing the finite realm with the First. In Avicenna’s words, “the First has no genus, no quiddity, no quality, no quantity, no ‘where,’ no ‘when,’ no equal, no partner, and no contrary – may He be exalted and magnified – [and] that He has no

104 See Avicenna, The Metaphysics. Bk. One. Chap. 6: 29-34: Avicenna argues that the Necessary Existent has no cause; that the possible existent is cause. Avicenna explains, “that which in itself is a necessary existent has no cause, while that which in itself is a possible existent has a cause” (30).
definition and [there is] no demonstration for Him.”\textsuperscript{110} The necessary being has no quiddity except His being itself.\textsuperscript{111} In other words, in relation to various divine attributes, Avicenna rejects any divine attributes as predicating God, but he affirms God’s attributes in relation to His utterly being Himself.\textsuperscript{112} For example, in dealing with various divine attributes, Avicenna conjoins the necessary being to His quiddity, which indicates that the necessary being is His existence.\textsuperscript{113} Such an idea of the One is explained in his \textit{The Healing}, Book Eight, Chapter 7, in his words:

\begin{quote}
The Necessary Existent – who is ultimate perfection, beauty, and splendor [and] who intellectually apprehends Himself in this ultimate [perfection,] beauty, and splendor by a perfect act of intellectual apprehension and by an act of intellectual apprehension that [grasp] the intellectual apprehender and the intelligible as being one in reality – [is such that,] for Himself, His self is the greatest lover and object of love and the greatest partaker of enjoyment and object enjoyed.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

In sum, with the above examination of Avicenna’s \textit{The Healing}, we can sum up the meaning of Avicenna’s Necessary Being (The First Being, the One, or God), which is necessary being, not composed (He rules out all divine attributes to privations and relations of the First), and must be a simple One. Such an understanding of the One excludes every mode of composition, including the composition of quiddity (essence) and existence; he says, “[the First] is only described by means of negating all similarities of Him and affirming to Him all relation.”\textsuperscript{115} It seems that such an idea of the unknowable One is very much a continuity of Plotinus’ One, who also holds that the One cannot be captured quidditatively, and also can be found in Aquinas’ and Al-Ghazali’s understandings of divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{116}

\subsection*{2.2.5 The Philosophers’ One in relation to Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ Divine Simplicity}

We have briefly looked into the notion of \textit{The One} in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Avicenna. In this section, it would be better for us to evaluate how Al-Ghazali and Aquinas form their perspectives, looking at continuity and discontinuity between them. This formation is in line with philosophical arguments offering further refinements of the idea of the One, including its ultimate causal explanation and what it entails. For the context of Al-Ghazali and Aquinas in relation to the above philosophers, or in comparing the respective viewpoints of philosophers’ on the One (particularly of Avicenna’s the First) with Al-Ghazali and Aquinas’

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics}. Bk. Eight. Chap. 5: 282.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics}. Bk. Eight. Chap. 4: 277-278.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics}. Bk. Eight. Chap. 4: 277-278.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics}. Bk. Eight. Chap. 7: 291-298.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics}. Bk. Eight. Chap. 7: 297.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics}. Bk. Eight. Chap. 5: 283.
\item \textsuperscript{116} For Al-Ghazali, I will pick up the influences of Avicenna in Chapter 3 & 5; and I will discuss the influences of Avicenna in Aquinas’ divine simplicity in Chapter 4 & 5.
\end{itemize}
views of divine simplicity, Al-Ghazali and Aquinas would agree that a number of similarities and differences are evident.

First, although Al-Ghazali’s *Tahafut Al-Falasifah (Incoherence of the Philosophers)* is a well-known treatise that criticizes Avicenna’s perception of God because of the incoherence of doctrines, Al-Ghazali knew and used Avicenna’s works in the context of his discussion with Avicenna’s philosophical and theological treatment of divine simplicity. The fact is that Al-Ghazali frames his discussion in *Tahafut* mainly from Avicenna’s position on divine simplicity. Besides, Al-Ghazali also agrees that only one who has mastered the science [of philosophy] to such a degree that he or she is qualified to show the incoherence of their doctrine. As Fakhry observes, Al-Ghazali’s works (*Manual of Aristotelian logic, The Criterion of Science* and *Tahafut*) form philosophical trilogy of the utmost significance for the study of the history of the controversy between the theologians and philosophers of Islam. It is clear that in relation to Avicenna and Al-Ghazali, it is not the positive influences of Avicenna that formed Al-Ghazali’s view of divine simplicity, but, instead, Avicenna’s view of divine simplicity triggered Al-Ghazali to thoroughly identify the anti-philosophical position on philosophical grounds.

Second, in comparing Avicenna’s and Aquinas’ appropriations of the Neo-Platonic idea of the First, we note that both thinkers affirm many similar ideas without hesitation. Even though they confront it in repetitive contexts, both thinkers eagerly adopt a theory of the First from Neo-Platonists in their perception of God as One. Despite the major contributions Avicenna’s metaphysics made to the study of unity in Aquinas’ works, Aquinas made some criticisms by transforming the Neo-Platonism of Avicenna – he criticized it and articulated his own theological understanding of divine simplicity. In short, this historical investigation shows that the idea of simplicity from the philosophical tradition played an important role in the formation of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrines of divine simplicity. The same can be said about the theological tradition before both great thinkers – as we will see now.

### 2.3 Divine Simplicity in Islamic *Kalam* before Al-Ghazali

As we discussed earlier, Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity is not the only version in Islamic tradition, and it is necessary in this section to investigate other Muslim scholastic theologians (i.e. Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi) who discussed divine simplicity in a way that diverges from Al-Ghazali. In this section, I will not enter into all of the theological issues,

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117 I will examine and discuss Al-Ghazali’s view on divine simplicity in Chapter 3.
120 Fakhry in his *A History of Islam*, 227.
121 Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut Al-Falasifah (Incoherence of the Philosophers)*; see chapter 3.
122 I will examine and discuss Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity in Chapter 4 & 5.
but select some that have been of crucial significance for the development of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Islamic traditions. Through these two thinkers, Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi, we are provided with the basic and proper ideas we need for a systematic analysis of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Al-Ghazali. Before doing that, however, I think it is important to include in this section the overview of the relation between faith and reason in the history of Islamic philosophy and *kalam*.

Fakhry observes that the interaction of philosophy and dogma in Islam can be traced back as early as the middle of the ninth century; it was the result of the transmission of philosophical canonical texts and philosophical terminology by the first Arab philosopher, namely, Al-Kindi (d. ca. 866). Through his transmission of philosophical text and terminology into Islam, the idea of the One has been “blended” into the spirit of Islamic dogma without exception. Furthermore, Al-Kindi also joined the ranks of theologians (only one form of *kalam* - Mutazilism during that time) arguing against some theologians and philosophers (i.e. Materialists, Manichaens, or Agnostics) who attacked many fundamental Islamic beliefs in that day. In his *On First Philosophy*, Al-Kindi boldly asserted that the ultimate goal of the philosopher is seeking the cause of knowledge, which is the True One, in his words,

\[ \text{is as regards his knowledge, \( \text{to attain the truth, and as regards his action, to act truthfully;...for we abstain and the activity ceases, once we have reached the truth...we do not find the truth we are seeking without finding a cause; the cause of the existence and continuance of everything is the True One, in that each thing which has being has truth.} \]

In the above passages, concerning the relation between philosophy and Islamic belief, Al-Kindi clearly points out that all philosophy is inquiry into the truth, and the ultimate aim of philosophy is to attain the True One; in his words: “the knowledge of the First truth who is the cause of all truth.” In other words, the ultimate cause and consummation of

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123 Fakhry in his *A History of Islamic*, 21-22: The Apocryphal *Theologia Aristotelis* and the *Liber de Causis* have been translated into Arabic, and then Latin; both philosophical texts have been described as the epitome of Greek Philosophy from the genuine teaching of Aristotle.

124 Fakhry in *A History of Islamic*, 90-91: Al-Kindi’s *Definition and Description of Things* contributes his perspectives on the history of philosophical ideas in Islam and the development of philosophical terminology among Arabs in the ninth century.

125 Fakhry in his *A History of Islamic*, 21.

126 Fakhry in his *A History of Islamic*, 29, 59, 67-95.

127 Fakhry in his *A History of Islamic*, 70. Compare with Prof. dr Recep Kilic in his *Al-Kindi: The First Creative Philosophical Writer in Islam* (Vrije Universiteit: Islamic Philosophy Class Handout, 2009).


129 *Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy*, 55, also compare with Fakhry in his *A History of Islamic*, 70, and Prof. dr Recep Kilic in his *Al-Kindi: The First Creative Philosophical Writer in Islam*. Lecture (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, April-May 2009): As Fakhry rightly observes, “for Al-Kindi, the true vocation of philosophy was not to contest the truth of revelation or make impudent claims of superiority, or even parity, with it. Philosophy, he believed, should simply surrender its claims to be the highest pathway to truth and be willing to subordinate itself as an ancillary to revelation.”

130 *Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy*, 56.
philosophy and Islam (theology) is the True One.  Also worth mentioning in this respect is the contribution of the great Neo-Platonist philosopher Al-Farabi (d. 950). In the development of Neo-Platonism in Islam, Al-Farabi is the first Muslim philosopher who gave a full systematic exposition of Plato and Aristotle; and he has been described as the first and outstanding logician and metaphysician of Islam. Al-Farabi also assesses the relation between Islam and philosophy in his own distinct way: “the idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and Imam is but a single idea.” This passage clearly indicates that Al-Farabi identified Islam and philosophy as identical sources and if the conflict between revelation and philosophy occurred, Al-Farabi viewed revelation as holding second place by upholding the primacy of reason.

In this short account of Al-Kindi’s and Al-Farabi’s works and background, we can see that although Al-Kindi affirms philosophy and Islamic dogma are both concerned with the same goal – the True One. On the other hand, Al-Farabi affirms that both philosophy and theology strive towards the same goal, but there is no synthesis between them, thus there is no possible conflict between philosophy and theology. In fact, both Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi had no intention to become precursors and contributed to the development of the Ash’arite school. In the history of Islamic Kalam, there are two main kalam schools: (1) Mu’tazillites school, (2) Ash’arites school. The former is considered to be the school of the earliest mutakallimun; they formed Mutazullah doctrine based on the principle that “God cannot enjoin what is contrary to reason or act with total disregard for the welfare of His creatures, in so far as this would compromise His justice and His wisdom.” The later school, the Ash’arites (or New Traditionalists) stemmed from the Mu’tazilite school itself by Abu’l-Hasan al-Ash’ari (d. 935). According to the traditional account, Al-Ash’ari refuted

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132 See Fakhry, *A History of Islamic*, 92, and “Al-Farabi and The Reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle” in *Journal of the History Idea*, 26, no.4 (October-December 1965): 469-478. Fakhry described Al-Farabi in this way: “[Al-Farabi] appears to have played a key role in the introduction of Greek philosophy into the Muslim world, since the translation of the other major philosophical document to find its way into that world, the Metaphysics of Aristotle, is said also to have been patronized by him” (470).
135 See Fakhry, *A History of Islamic*, 120. Fakhry indicates that Al-Farabi’s view in between revelation and philosophy this way, “whenever such principles (rooted in sense experience, tradition, or reason) are found to conflict with the express statements of Scripture, the latter should be interpreted allegorically.”
136 Fakhry in his *A History of Islamic*, 49, Mu’tazilite’s doctrines, see 43-66, and compare with Fakhry observations in p.59: “In rationalizing their view of the unity of God, the Mu’tazilite doctors were apparently influenced by the Aristotelian concept of God as the pure actuality of thought, in whom essence and attribute, thought and the object of thought, are identified, as well as by the Plotinian view that God, who transcends thought and being altogether, can only be known negatively.”
profoundly the excessive rationalism of the Mu’tazillites’ doctrines in their speculative conception of God and of human salvation when Al-Ash’ari reached the age of forty.137

In other words, the encounter between faith and reason in the history of Islamic philosophy and kalam is an inseparable relationship, or more precisely, faith and reason in Islam was the process of faith seeking understanding. For one cannot fully conceive of Islamic dogma without philosophical thinking, particularly divine simplicity. Thus, in this section, I will proceed with special emphasis on the idea of divine simplicity in the major predecessors of Al-Ghazali from the Islamic kalam of the Medieval Period. I shall now begin to discuss Al-Kindi’s divine simplicity (section 2.3.1), and in what follows we will examine Al-Farabi’s idea of divine simplicity (section 2.3.2).

2.3.1 Al-Kindi’ Metaphysics On First Philosophy
How does Al-Kindi (c. 801-873) describe the True One? In his On First Philosophy, Al-Kindi states that the True One/First Truth is the cause of philosophy since all philosophy is inquiry into the truth: “the knowledge of the First truth who is the cause of all truth.”138 To Al-Kindi, the truth is associated closely with being, he says “each thing which has being has truth.”139 With this in mind, then Al-Kindi’s True One is the cause of all truth, or more precisely, the cause of all being. Indeed, Al-Kindi insists that the First Philosopher (or the perfect and most noble philosopher) is the man who fully understands the knowledge140 – such knowledge, Al-Kindi states, includes “knowledge of Divinity, unity and virtue, and a complete knowledge of everything useful…”141 Here I would like to summarize Al-Kindi’s explanations of the nature of the True One:
(1) The True One is the necessary existent being.142 Al-Kindi states that the necessary and uncaused being and True One must be the eternal being: “the eternal is that which must never have been a non-existent being, the eternal being having no existential ‘before’ to its being…the eternal has no cause; the eternal has neither subject nor predicate…no genus…[nor] species.”143
(2) Al-Kindi further describes this Eternal Being as unchanging and indestructible, since change in general and destruction in particular result from the supervision upon the subject of the “nearest contrary only,” such as cold and heat, which belong to the one genus.144

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138 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 56.
139 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 55.
140 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 56-60.
141 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 59.
142 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 55, 67.
143 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 67.
144 Al-Kindi, On First Philosophy, 67.
(3) Al-Kindi also argues that since the eternal being cannot be deficient, and is an unmoved mover, then, the eternal is necessarily perfect. Al-Kindi explains this way, “since it cannot ever move to more excellent, nor to more deficient, than it, the Eternal, is therefore, of necessity, perfect.”

(4) Al-Kindi states that the necessary being also must not have a body, for a body (involving the description of the Eternal being) would have to possess, in his words, “quantity [plurality] or quality, to be infinite in actuality, infinity being only in potentiality.”

(5) With regard to the distinction or relationship between essence and existence, Al-Kindi in section three of *On First Philosophy*, clearly indicates that it is not possible for a thing, were it an existent thing, to be the cause of the generation of its essence, since a thing would be itself and it would not be itself.

(6) Al-Kindi also observes that when we speak of the One, in his words, “it is one by nature and its composition one…by accidental unity.” For Al-Kindi, One is only attribution of “all,” and “some,” but not “part.” This is because “part” implies enumerate and divides “all” into equal amounts; while “some” predicates of that which does not enumerate “all” (uniformly) but divides and apportions it into unequal amounts.

(7) Finally, for Al-Kindi, the True One is a one, true, of necessity uncaused unity. He explains that if the One has a nature of predicate, it is in the sense of “unity an existent non-existent.” Al-Kindi investigates that all types of predicates imply both unity and multiplicity; in his words, “it is not possible for things to be a multiplicity without unity, in that it is impossible for some things to be a multiplicity without unity.” Furthermore, Al-Kindi also argues that nothing can be its own cause, or more precisely, nothing can be the cause of its own unity. Finally, Al-Kindi explores the association of unity and multiplicity in all things by indicating that the association cannot be by chance; nor can it be caused by things themselves because this creates an indefinite series of causes. Therefore, Al-Kindi concludes that the cause associates with the True One must be, in his words,

[the True One is] another cause, other than themselves, more illustrious, more noble and prior to them … a cause outside of the associated things … is neither in genus, nor likeness nor resemblance, but rather it is the cause of the association’s generation and consolidation … is the first cause … is neither

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145 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 68.
146 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 68.
147 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 68.
148 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 68.
149 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 76-77.
152 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 84.
155 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 93-95.
156 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 94.
multiple nor multiple and single ... therefore, other than that the cause be single only, in no way accompanied by multiplicity ... the first cause is [One].

(8) In section four of *On First Philosophy*, Al-Kindi continues to argue that the various kinds of predicate are inappropriate to the True One. I would sum up Al-Kindi’s investigations as follows: For Al-Kindi, the True One is an element of number but not a number, no matter and indivisible, not units, not composite, no form composed of genus and species, no quantity and quality, no relation, not motion (unmoved mover), not soul, not identified by synonymous names; therefore, “the True One is not ‘one’ of these.” But, Al-Kindi concludes that the True One (or the First cause) is the only and “absolute One that which is not multiple at all and the unity of which is nothing other than its being.”

It is worthwhile to quote Al-Kindi’s conclusion on the nature of True One:

The True One, therefore, has neither matter, form, quantity, quality, or relation, is not described by any of the remaining intelligible things, and has neither genus, specific difference, individual, property, common accident or movement; and it is not described by any of the things which are denied to be one in truth. It is accordingly, pure and simple unity, i.e. (having) nothing other than unity, while every other one is multiple.

As mentioned above, this conclusion has been compared to the view of those contemporary theologians referred to as Mu‘tazilites. They similarly took a strict view on the question of divine attributes, arguing that God's simplicity ruled out the acceptance of any attributes distinct from God's essence. However, Greek antecedents are clearly the main influence on Al-Kindi here. His “true One” bears a strong resemblance to the first principle of the Neo-Platonists. Indeed, we might be reminded of Plato himself, insofar as Al-Kindi's God seems to function like a Platonic Form. Just as the Form of Equal is entirely equal and not at all unequal, and serves to explain equality in other things, so God is entirely one, not at all multiple, and explains the unity in other things. Therefore, only God is absolutely one, both in being and in concept, lacking any multiplicity whatsoever.

### 2.3.2 Al-Farabi’ *On The Perfect State*

In this section, I will attempt to answer this question: How does Al-Farabi (c. 872-951) express his idea of the One or First? In his well-known and major metaphysical treatise *On The Perfect State* (*Al-Madinah al-Fadilah*), Al-Farabi begins with the discussion of the First Being, or the One of Plotinus. In his *On The Perfect State*, let me summarize as follows:

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158 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 96-114, especially in 113.
159 Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, 112.
Al-Farabi perceives that the One or First, as the First Cause of all things, is perfect, necessary, self-sufficient, eternal, uncaused, immaterial, without associate or contrary, and is not susceptible of being defined. In addition to these attributes, the First possesses unity, wisdom, and life, not as distinct attributes superadded to his essence, but as part of his very essence. What sets him apart from other entities is logically the unity of his essence, by virtue of which he exists. And in so far as he is neither matter nor associated with matter, he must be essentially an intellect. Matter is what hinders form from being an intellect in act, so what is divested of matter altogether is essentially an intellect in act.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, Al-Farabi tried to demonstrate the concept of God as essence and existence blending absolutely, with no possible separation between the two. However, there is no getting away from the fact that it is the Neo-Platonic element (transcendental concept), which dominates so much of Al-Farabi's On The Perfect State. We observe this too in Al-Farabi's references to God in a negative mode, describing the divine Being by what He is not: He has no partner, He is indivisible and indefinable.¹⁶² Besides, Al-Farabi also characterizes the First as the top hierarchy in everything. For example, Al-Farabi states that this emanates a second being, which is the First Intellect.¹⁶³ Like God, this being is an immaterial substance, and these total of ten intellects emanate from the First Being.¹⁶⁴ The First Intellect comprehends God and, in consequence of that comprehension, produces a third being, which is the Second Intellect. The First Intellect also comprehends its own essence.

2.4 Divine Simplicity in Christian Theology before Thomas Aquinas

In Section 2.2.5 we briefly discussed the positive and negative influences of the One on Aquinas’ understanding of divine simplicity. It was also indicated that without visiting medieval Islamic philosophy, particularly Avicenna’s Metaphysics, one may not fully understand the polemics of Aquinas on divine simplicity.¹⁶⁵ We also observed that in the tradition of Christian dogma before Aquinas, there were many versions of divine simplicity being formulated and developed.¹⁶⁶ For example, in the early church fathers’ treatises: the works of Clement of Alexandria (A.D 150-211) and Origen (A.D. 185-254), we find already the “foreshadow” of divine simplicity and unity; and in Irenaeus’ Adversus Haereses (or

¹⁶¹ This is a summary from Al-Farabi, On the Perfect State, 57-88; cf. also Fakhry, A History, 121-122.
¹⁶² See Al-Farabi, On the Perfect State, 57-88.
¹⁶³ See Al-Farabi, On the Perfect State, 57-88.
¹⁶⁴ See Al-Farabi, On the Perfect State, 57-88.
Against All Heresies, A.D. 180), we also see a more complete version of divine simplicity. Following Irenaeus, the most prominent early church father, Augustine (A.D. 354-430), who adopted Irenaeus’ view on divine simplicity, stated as an orthodox understanding of divine simplicity in Christianity the “numerically” and “identical” unity of the Trinity, in which there is “no division” of divine essence, and in his words,

All those Catholic expounders of the divine Scriptures, both Old and New, whom I have been able to read, who have written before me concerning the Trinity, Who is God, have purposed to teach, according to the Scriptures, this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; of one undivided substance, numerically and identically the same in each; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God.

Besides, in the Divine Names, Dionysius The Areopagite (A.D. 500) also indicates the nature of divine unification in divine names, “all the Names proper to God are applied in Scripture not partially but to the whole, entire, full, complete Godhead, and that they all refer indivisible, absolutely, unreservedly, and wholly to all the wholeness of the whole and entire Godhead.” In fact, in one of the catholic creeds and confessions of faith in the Christian tradition (or a Christian profession of faith), namely, the Athanasian Creed (A.D. 500), it is clearly demonstrated that such an Augustinian version of divine simplicity was essential to Christian belief: “[a]nd the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence]. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the

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168 Augustine, De Trinitate contra Arianos libri quindecim (The Treatise on the Holy Trinity), Chapter 4. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.iv.i.iii.iv.html [Accessed Jan-June 2009]; see also Augustine, De Civitate Dei (The City of God), Book XI.10, trans. Dr. Marcos Dods. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XI.10.html [Accessed Jan-June 2009]; and Augustine, “Chapter III: God the Creator of All; the Goodness of All Creation” in Enchiridion (or The Handbook of Faith, Love and Hope), trans. Albert C. Outler. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/ENCHIRIDION.CHAP3.HTML [Accessed Jan-June 2009]: The similar key phrases, such as “[a] good which is alone simple, and therefore alone unchangeable, and this is God;…Trinity is one God; and none the less simple because a Trinity;…it is simple, because it is what it has,” in De Civitate Dei; “the Creator who is the one and the true God” in Enchiridion, “the unity of the Trinity” in De Trinitate, is appearing everywhere in Augustine’s thought as the very foundation of his whole doctrinal system. Although Aquinas considered Augustine as authoritative for his works, due to limitation of space, I have not been able to include them in this study.

169 Dionysius The Areopagite, The Divine Names, Chapter 2 in The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology, trans. C.E. Rolt. Seventh Impression (London: SPCK, 1975), 65. Although Aquinas used both Augustine’s and Dionysius’ texts as authoritative for his works, due to limitation of space I have not been able to include them in this study.
Majesty coeternal…And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal… one uncreated: and one incomprehensible [infinite]… one Almighty…one God…”\textsuperscript{170}

From the above sketch of the origin and the development of the doctrine of divine simplicity in the Christian tradition, it is inevitably the idea of “God’s necessary being as utterly simple” that has implanted in Christian widely since the 1\textsuperscript{st} century. Like the Islamic tradition, the predicates that are attributed to God’s simplicity became one of the issues that deserved explanation by the early Church fathers, as well as medieval theologians. However, unlike the Islamic tradition, there is another cluster of problems that mainly arises within the Christian monotheistic tradition, namely, the doctrine of triune God – the existence of God as one in essence and three in persona (“three persona of one divine nature”).\textsuperscript{171} As a matter of fact, such a notion of “God as one and triune” not only became an orthodox confession, but also became the norm for theological reflections in Christianity.\textsuperscript{172} I have also presented an account of the doctrine of divine simplicity, which played an important role in shaping the doctrine of God of the medieval Christian scholars, particularly Aquinas.\textsuperscript{173}

The doctrine of divine simplicity not only became one the normative assumptions of theological inquiry in the Cappadocian Fathers, but in fact, such a Christian classical view on divine simplicity – One God in Trinity – received its most articulated development and careful defence at the hands of the medieval scholastic theologians such as Anselm (1033-1109), Peter Lombard (1095-1160), Alexander of Hales (1183-1245), Albert the Great (1200?-1280) and Bonaventure (1221-1274).\textsuperscript{174} In other words, Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity (1225-1274) is not the only version coming from medieval Christianity. Indeed, there are many medieval scholastic theologians who formulated their versions of divine simplicity in a very diverse way. In this section, however, I will not to explore all the above mentioned Christian thinkers’ works on divine simplicity; rather I aim to examine the version of divine simplicity in two key Christian theologians whose works had been a great influence on Aquinas’ understanding of divine simplicity, namely, Peter Lombard and Albert the Great.

2.4.1 Peter Lombard’s The Sentences

Peter Lombard’s collection of Sententia (\textit{The Sentences}) served as a definitive form or standard format for theological discussion among advanced professionals, training...

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{172}We have observed from Section 2.4 that with respect to the concept of God, believing in the Triune One is a mark of the orthodox Christian view.
\bibitem{173}See Section 2.2. We have already seen that Doctrine of Divine Simplicity has its roots in antiquity, and perhaps one may able to trace it ultimately to \textit{Parmenides}, but Doctrine of Divine Simplicity received its most articulated development and careful defence at the hands of the medieval scholastic theologians.
\end{thebibliography}
generations of theologians in the thirteenth, fourteenth, as well as the fifteenth centuries. In other words, Lombard’s Sentences had made a crucial contribution to the development of Medieval Theology. Indeed, Aquinas too had written a commentary on The Sentences during this high scholastic period. For Peter Lombard, the discussions of divine simplicity occur mainly in his First Sentence, Distinction 8, Q 4-8. According to Lombard, divine simplicity excludes all manner of composition, whether in terms of substance and accident, matter and form, parts, or attributes, and he asserts that all of God’s attributes or qualities/properties are identical to His simple being. Lombard also affirms the full divinity of each of persona of the Trinity; each of the personae possesses the divine essence indivisibly. Such understandings seem to be in a tension position (non-composite simplicity versus inseparable unity). However, it does advocate the truth of the scripture (Holy Bible) that “God is one and God is three.” In other words, the oneness of God cannot be defined as ultimately oneness without threeness; equally, the threeness cannot be defined as ultimately threeness without the oneness. The divine attributes, therefore, belong to the personae not in their distinction but in their unity as unity in Trinity.

2.4.2 Albert the Great’s the Metaphysics and Summa Theologiae

Like Lombard, Albert the Great went into considerable detail to deny any composition in God. Albert states that not in a physical or a metaphysical, nor a logical manner is God composite; Albert concludes to “the definition of God as the necessary being, as absolute being.” Unlike Avicenna, Albert states that the definition of being is found in the sense of “the first emanation from God and the first created thing;” not God but “being qua being” is the subject matter of metaphysics. Albert did share a view similar to Avicenna’s idea of the cause of being. As Leo J. Elders observes, Albert speaks about five kinds of causes and distinguishes two causes (material and efficient causes). Besides, while Anselm and Lombard had indicated that divine simplicity entails the ultimate unknowability of God or that which is beyond our comprehension, Albert the Great distinguished carefully between the nature of the divine and the creaturely attributes of God: the later, Albert commented, was possible, the former impossible.

175 See Muller, Post-Reformation, vol 3, 46.
176 Aquinas, selected texts from Commentary on the Sentences (see Chapter 1. note 38).
178 See Peter Lombard, First Sentence, Dist. 8, 1; also compare with ee Thomas Aquinas’s Earliest Treatment, 1Sentence 1, Disc. 8, Q3-5.
179 See the discussion on Albert the Great on divine simplicity in Muller, Post-Reformation, vol 3, 53.
182 See Muller, Post-Reformation, vol 3, 47.
2.5 Conclusion and Transition
We have seen the preceding discussion about the origin and development of doctrine of divine simplicity in Christian tradition. In fact, it is a fundamental for the Christian Church to proclamation of God’s singularity before Aquinas. For this reason, it will be useful to have before us a few of their statements of the doctrine:

A. A Brief Summary of Doctrine of Divine Simplicity before Aquinas
A few passages from the Biblical Scripture:\(^{183}\)

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one (אֶחדא, singular one)” (Deut. 6:4, see Israel’s Shema).

“I am the LORD your God … you shall have no other gods before me.” (Ex. 20:1-3)

Jesus answered, “The first [commandment] is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Mk. 12:29).

“And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

Jesus answered, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30).

“yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1Cor. 8:6).

A familiar passage from the early Church Fathers
“He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence.”\(^{184}\)

Irenaeus’ Adversus Haereses (Against All Heresies, A.D. 180)

All those Catholic expounders of the divine Scriptures,… concerning the Trinity, Who is God…. according to the Scriptures, this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; of one undivided substance, numerically and identically the same in each; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God (Augustine’s De Trinitate, A.D. 400-416).\(^{185}\)

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\(^{183}\) Biblical citations are the traditional canonical Scripture that is adopted by both the Catholic and Protestant Church (containing both the Old and New Testaments, but without the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books); and the Bible translation is mainly from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.


“For of Him, and through Him, and in Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. For if of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so as to assign each clause severally to each person: of Him, that is to say, of the Father; through Him, that is to say, through the Son; in Him, that is to say, in the Holy Spirit — it is manifested that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one God, inasmuch as the words continue in the singular number,...” (Augustine’s De Trinitate, A.D. 400-416).

Here are some passages from Christian Creeds and Confession (Statement of Christian Belief):

“I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”
(Apostles’ Creed, A.D. 390).

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.”
(Nicene Creed, A.D. 325)

“So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man ...”
(Chalcedon Confession, A.D. 451).

“the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence]. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal...And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal...one uncreated [infinite]...one Almighty...one God...” (Athanasian Creed, A.D. 500)

Again, here is a passage from Dionysius The Areopagite’s The Divine Names

“All the Names proper to God are applied in Scripture not partially but to the whole, entire, full, complete Godhead, and that they all refer indivisible, absolutely, unreservedly, and wholly to all the wholeness of the whole and entire Godhead.”

Here is a similar passage from Anselm’s Proslogian

“God is life, wisdom, eternity, and every true good. --Whatever is composed of parts is not wholly one; it is capable, either in fact or in concept, of dissolution. In God wisdom, eternity, etc., are not parts, but one, and the very whole which God is, or unity itself, not even in concept divisible.”

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Peter Lombard’s *The Sentences On the simplicity of the same.*

And the Same alone is properly and truly simple, where there is neither of parts nor of accidents or of whatever forms any diversity or variation and/or multitude. But so that you may know, in what manner that Substance be simple…. 189

It is not surprising that similar passages pervade Aquinas’ formulation of doctrine of divine simplicity in his Summa:

“[I]n a simple being, being and that which is the same. For, if one is not the other, the simplicity is then removed. But, as we have shown, God is absolutely simple. Therefore, for God to be good is identical with God. He is, therefore, His goodness.”

(*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I,38)

“His simplicity, whereby we deny composition in Him; and because whatever is simple in material things is imperfect and a part of something else, we shall discuss (2) His perfection; (3) His infinity; (4) His immutability; (5) His unity (or oneness).”

(S.T. Q3, Intro.)

“… God is the most truly simple thing there is” (S.T. Q3,7).

The above survey and examination of selected canonical texts in Islamic thinkers, as well as in Christian thinkers demonstrates a similar but not identical picture: The argumentation of both Islamic and Christian traditions seems to begin on similar ground (the fact of the existence of God as One), but when proceeding toward the end of the arguments, both traditions’ contemplation of God results in different ideas of divine simplicity. The unity of God in Islamic *kalam’s* doctrine of divine simplicity and the “Triunity” of God in the Christian doctrine of divine simplicity. In Christian tradition, the doctrine of the Trinity neither does nor should call into question the affirmation that God is one. For example, baptism is in the one name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not in three divine names. This reflects the fact that the Christian faith does not have three objects, which would mean three Gods, but not one. The Christian God is not threefold and there is no plurality of gods within the one Godhead. It can be traced back as far as Aristotle, and since the Middle Ages vast amounts of philosophical thought have been devoted to elaborating and defending it. It has been the dominant tradition among Christians as well as among non-Christians. It has been presupposed in attacks on Christianity and on the possibility of Christian scholarship, and in defences of Christianity and of the possibility of Christian scholarship.

CHAPTER 3: AL-GHAZALI ON DIVINE SIMPLICITY

3.1 INTRODUCTION
3.1.1 Divine Simplicity and the Scope of Its Study
In Islamic tradition, the phrase “there is no god but God,” is the undeniable, essential characteristic of monotheism. In this monotheistic belief, if God is one, the possibility of divine attributes attaining union with Him became a problematic question in the doctrine of divine simplicity, and has been treated from various perspectives in Islam. In the treatment of the problem of divine predicates or attributes (the Arabic term sifat) in Sunni Islam, Al-Ghazali’s view on divine simplicity is a major representative. Al-Ghazali solved the problem of characterizing a simple God by maintaining a number of eternal divine attributes without destroying the simplicity of God: whatever the seven essential attributes are, they are not parts of God. In Al-Ghazali’s major works, God is characterized as wholly unique; though He has attributes, His attributes “are not identical, but not different” with His essence.

In this chapter, I shall be focussing mainly on his Tahafut al-Falasifah and a few other selected texts in order to answer the question: How did Al-Ghazali solve the problem arising from the relation between divine essence and divine attributes in his doctrine of divine simplicity? To do so, I first present the main issues that are worthy of discussion in Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity in the locus of kalam (or theology) history, or Islamic scholasticism. The historical survey in the previous chapter shows that the ascription of God’s simplicity in Islam has never simply meant to say that God is One in an absolute sense. We then also learned from Section 2.3: Divine Simplicity in Islam before Al-Ghazali, that...
there are various perspectives to treat the problem of characterizing the doctrine of divine simplicity, namely the relations between divine essence and divine predicates or attributes – what does a simple God mean? Does it mean completely without parts? It is worth noting that although many Islamic thinkers shared the convictions that God’s essence is a unique one, perfect, and creator of all that is not himself, each of their claims entails a variety of interpretations. Among the variety of interpretations, I hereby sum up two major arguments concerning what God’s simplicity is from two kalam schools:

**Mu’tazillite’s Argument (M’s Argument):** this argument is commonly known as a position from Mu’tazillah school: God is completely simple if and only if God does not obtain any parts of any sort at any moment in every possible world. According to this position, divine simplicity is as the pure actuality of thought; in God essence and attribute are identified; and rejection of eternal attributes coexisting in God.194

**Ash’arite’s Argument (A’s Argument):** this argument is commonly known as a position from the Ash’arite school: God is completely simple, that is, without parts of any sort. According to this position, divine simplicity is a unique oneness; in God essence and attributes are not identified, but the Ash’arites sought to accept seven divine predicates (the seven essential attributes of power, knowledge, life, will, hearing, sight, and speech, stated to subsist eternally in God) as distinct from God’s essence and somehow avoid the dangers of allegorical interpretation.195

Following the A’s argument, Al-Ghazali’s conception of the nature of divine simplicity is in accordance with Ash’arite’s school. R. M. Frank observes that in describing God’s uniqueness and wholeness, Al-Ghazali employs the traditional kalam of the Ash’arites,196 as he describes divine attributes as “distinguishable from His essence and … eternal and … subsistent in His essence.”197 This shows that divine attributes are neither identical nor different with divine essence in Al-Ghazali’s thought, just like Ash’arites believe. But in any case, one will claim that the precise meaning of the phrase “divine attributes are neither identical nor different with divine essence” in Al-Ghazali’s claim should be sorted out. Accordingly, I have come to realize that Al-Ghazali’s concept of divine simplicity has been discussed and interpreted variously by many scholars. Shortly after Al-Ghazali’s death, his concept of divine simplicity had triggered heated and thorough discussion by one of the prominent Islamic philosophers, Averroes. In his work *Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence, 201*) Averroes represents the M’s arguments and refutes Al-Ghazali’s *Tahafut*. However, most modern scholars defended or reintroduced Al-Ghazali’s views about knowing the unknowable God in a more philosophical way. For example, Fadlou Shehadi comments that Al-Ghazali’s view on divine simplicity is grounded on Al-Ghazali’s twofold idea of God: “His essence is unknowable” and “His attributes and acts is knowable.”198 In Al-Ghazali’s twofold idea, as Shehadi explains, the divine essential attributes are particular attributes, but nevertheless the divine essence is simple.199 With this in mind, Shehadi points out that to Al-Ghazali, it is logically possible to acknowledge divine

197 See *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, 2-4. Al-Ghazali reiterated this concept throughout his argument.
attributes and divine simplicity without compromise, if we acknowledge human inability to
know God in se (or divine essence is utterly unknowable). Following Shehadi’s model,
David B. Burrell also notes that Al-Ghazali’s God is the unknowable One, but Burrell also
indicates that Al-Ghazali’s response to the unknowable God is founded in the “heart.” Burrell points out that Al-Ghazali with this “heart” counteracts the limits of the intellect for
knowing the unknowable God. I will not, however, discuss or even quote all of these
contributions, but will make a reasonable choice in the light of this singular interest. Thus, I
will focus on studies with the definition and conceptual analysis of Al-Ghazali’s divine
simplicity in this chapter.

At this point, it seems helpful for me to trace the main paradigm in order to set out the
parameters within which my own discussion on Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity will have to
be conducted. Harry A. Wolfson’s observation of the history of kalam is worth noting.
Wolfson indicates three aspects of divine attributes that appear to be problematic: (1) the
ontological aspect; (2) the semantic aspect; and (3) the philosophical/logical aspect.
Wolfson provides the key problem of divine attributes in the history of Islam kalam. Based
on Wolfson’s paradigm, we are able to identify that Al-Ghazali discusses mainly the
ontological and semantic aspects of divine simplicity. Al-Ghazali’s description of the relation
between the seven essential divine attributes and divine essence and his expression of the
twofold conceptions of God’s unity in Tahafut implies that he was conscious of what
Wolfson calls the ontological and semantic problem of divine attributes.

In addition, I would like to give the basic thoughts of Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine
simplicity based on his major works, and we will see how the following statements
demonstrate Al-Ghazali’s attempts to solve the problems of divine simplicity. These
statements deserve further discussion in this chapter, though that will occur with what Al-
Ghazali intends to say as we move along below:

1. In his discussion of divine essence, Al-Ghazali argues this way, in his words: “[God] is
   not quantifiable,... [nor] divisible;”

2. He further explains how the divine essence must be neither quantifiable nor divisible by
   indicating that “[God is] one… which has no equal in its rank;”

3. In Tahafut he rejects plurality in God’s essence (according “the five categories of
   plurality”).

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200 See Fadlou Shehadi, Ghazali’s God, 101-114.
182, especially in 174: Burrell based on Al-Ghazali’s Ihya (Faith in Divine Unity) indicates that “the lure of the
unknowable One – heart (qalb), spirit (ruh), self/soul (nafs), and reason or intellect (‘aql) – each of the last three
is said to be given its inner orientation by the heart, which is said itself to be a divine thing (amr rabbani).”
203 Harry A. Wolfson, “Philosophical Implications of the Problem of Divine Attributes in the Kalam,”
204 Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence: A Translation from the Iqtisad fi Al-I’tiqad with notes and
206 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 100-101: Al-Ghazali denies these five categories of plurality, and I will
pick up this discussion in the following chapter to understand what Al-Ghazali intends to say, (1) being
receptive to division whether actually or in the imagination; (2) from the intellectual division of a thing into two
different concepts, not quantitatively, like the division of a body into Form and Matter; (3) plurality through
attributes by the supposition of knowledge, power, and will, for if the existence of such attributes were
necessary, necessary existence would be common to both God’s essence and these attributes, thereby negating
unity; (4) an intellectual plurality resulting from the composition of genus species; (5) the plurality of the
essence and existence.
(4) In *Tahafut, Prob.VI*, “Refutation of their denial of the divine attributes,” Al-Ghazali affirms the divine attributes; they are uncaused. ²⁰⁷
(5) In *Tahafut, Prob.VI*, Al-Ghazali concludes in this way, in his words: “The First Principle (God) is a possessor of attributes who is eternal and uncaused, and whose (a) essence; (b) attributes, and (c) the subsistence of the attributes in the essence are all uncaused, each existing from eternity to eternity.” ²⁰⁸ In the next section I will show how Al-Ghazali arrived at this point.

So we see In these statements we see how Al-Ghazali’s draws the lines within which he develops his interpretation of divine simplicity. Following the Ash’arites, Al-Ghazali stresses that although there are differences between the divine attributes, yet they exist in the one divine essence. Again, in defending Ash’arites argument, Al-Ghazali states that God is truly simple and uniquely one though He has seven essential attributes; His attributes “are not identical, but not different” with His essence. This sophisticated idea in Al-Ghazali’s view on divine simplicity deserves a discussion in this chapter to answer the question: How does Al-Ghazali’s idea attempt to solve the problem of divine simplicity? Or does Al-Ghazali’s idea of divine simplicity leave other critical questions unanswered? And is Al-Ghazali’s idea of divine simplicity compatible or incompatible with Aquinas’ idea of divine simplicity? Indeed, as I will show in the next chapter, Al-Ghazali’s ontological description of the divine essence and attributes presents a clearer and more explicit view than those of any of his predecessors. Therefore, we will proceed by offering an outline of what follows in the next section.

### 3.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

*Preliminary remarks:* Before we embark upon the following discussions, it is necessary to stress what we can, and cannot do in this chapter.. First, it is not the primary purpose of this chapter to resolve the contradiction between Al-Ghazali’s and Mu‘tazillah’s views on divine simplicity, rather it is to indicate how the concept of divine simplicity is characterized in Al-Ghazali’s major works. In other words, this chapter focuses on discussing how Al-Ghazali interprets divine simplicity, especially in relation with divine attributes. Second, at this point, I am only examining the English translation of Al-Ghazali’s major works as I am not acquainted with Arabic and Persian. Third, Al-Ghazali’s works are strikingly extensive and rich; in order to get a better insight into his views on the oneness and unity of God, some main theological issues that are narrowly related to simplicity will be examined as well (stated in Section 1.4: *The Nature and Problems of Comparative Study*).

In Section 3.2 I first concentrate on the main arguments of Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity, especially what the nature of simplicity meant according to him. I attempt to show that Al-Ghazali could have solved the problem of divine simplicity by describing a unique *wholeness* in the concept of God, through which he safeguarded the oneness of God without sacrificing God’s attributes. Second, in Section 3.3, I begin to examine some theological issues (see Chapter 1.4: such as the essence and existence of God; the unknowability of God and the world; divine names and attributes; the uncreated Koran) as far as they are related to Al-Ghazali’s discussion of divine simplicity. This examination attempts to find out whether Al-Ghazali has successfully solved the problem of divine simplicity, as well as to discover his grounds for safeguarding a wholly unique God. An overall evaluation of the preceding examinations will be presented at the end of this chapter.

²⁰⁹ Al-Ghazali’s major works in English translations: see (note 4).
3.2 THE NATURE OF SIMPLICITY: GOD IS THE WHOLLY UNIQUE ONE

3.2.1 Preliminary Remarks
It is important to note that, generally, the nature of divine simplicity is very difficult to understand, to analyse, and to explain, partly due to the complication and different terms used in the discussion of this topic. In Al-Ghazali’s works, various terms are used to discuss divine simplicity, for example, the unity, the oneness, uniqueness, the different one, the absolute one, etc. Nevertheless, these terms are used synonymously; they refer to the same aspect of divine simplicity. In order to avoid confusion arising from the usage of terms, this study will unify and typify the terms Al-Ghazali uses in his discussion of divine simplicity. Indeed, Al-Ghazali uses two terms which he relates narrowly and even identifies, namely, uniqueness and wholeness in describing divine simplicity. ‘Uniqueness-wholeness’ is, we could say, identically simple. As far as I am concerned, I will indicate how this is a twofold idea of Al-Ghazali that lies at the heart of his doctrine of divine simplicity.

In this chapter, I prefer to use “uniqueness” and “wholeness” when referring to numerical “singularity” or “oneness” (e.g., there is only One God) as these unusual terms suggest distinct features as opposed to the usual terms, such as “one.” More importantly, I feel that we can understand Al-Ghazali’s characterisation of God’s simplicity very clearly in terms of uniqueness and wholeness. Although “uniqueness” and “wholeness” certainly can be understood in a variety of ways, the ordinary understanding of these terms helps us to grasp Al-Ghazali’s view of the nature of God’s simplicity. Furthermore, “uniqueness” and “wholeness” make us aware of the conceptual complications involved in divine simplicity. As for Al-Ghazali, the usage of “uniqueness” does not necessarily imply the oneness, but that God is the absolutely unique one; the use of “wholeness” does not necessarily imply many, because God is total wholeness. We may discuss below why and how Al-Ghazali can ascribe “uniqueness” and “wholeness” to God in his divine simplicity. This task is not an easy one, but is undertaken in the following section.

3.2.2 The Nature of Simplicity: “Uniqueness” and “Wholeness”
In Islamic tradition, the question of the existence of God is not the main issue in the doctrine of God, but the nature of divine essence and attributes, and their relationship between one essence and many attributes in God became the central problem in the development of the Kalam, as well as in Islamic philosophy (see Chapter 2). To Al-Ghazali, what sort of a being is God? Or what does he think about the doctrine of divine simplicity? In his treatise on Divine Essence, Al-Ghazali, before drawing the general conclusion that God is simple, dismisses various specific modes of composition. Al-Ghazali argues that God is “not quantifiable or quantification” nor “divisible,” and “has no equal in its rank.” As these modes of non-composites help to make clear, Al-Ghazali’s view of divine simplicity means that God is indivisible, incomparable, unequalled, and incomprehensible. So, what kind of nature of divine simplicity does Al-Ghazali propose? These terms in Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity tell us that the nature of God’s simplicity is wholly unique oneness. Also in his al-Iqtisad fi’l-‘tiqad, the major work of his kalam, he explains divine simplicity by juxtaposing two passages, and bases it mainly on this twofold idea – the uniqueness of God and the wholeness of God. My discussion in this section will proceed as follows. I will begin to demonstrate first the twofold idea and analyse whether his view is consistent. The

211 See Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence. 198-99.
212 Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence. 198-99.
twofold idea of uniqueness and wholeness can be found in the following passages of the *Iqtisad fi Al-I’tiqad (On Divine Essence)*:  

[God] He is not quantifiable, meaning that quantification denies something is **wholeness** by dividing it. But [God] is **not divisible**, since divisibility pertains to things that are quantifiable. Quantification results in division into parts, becoming smaller. But that which is not quantifiable cannot be described as divisible. Furthermore, [one] can be understood as that which has **no equal** in its rank, such as when we say that the sun is one.  

By eternal being [God/the Maker of the world] we do not mean anything but a being whose existence has not been preceded by non-existence. Thus, nothing comes under the term eternal except the affirmation of a being and the negation of a prior non-being.  

The above passages show that the twofold idea is basic in Al-Ghazali’s understanding of the oneness of God. Through explaining what not a true concept of God is, Al-Ghazali expounds the uniqueness and wholeness of God. Let us revisit these two passages above to explore how Al-Ghazali formulates his twofold idea of God. To do so, I hereby present Al-Ghazali’s arguments (based on the above two passages) by summarising them into the following premises:  

*Premise 1: God is not a quantification but a wholeness;*  
*Premise 2: God is completely one as the unique being;*  
*Conclusion: God is an absolutely unique-whole-indefinite Being*  

Three important remarks can be made from the above premises. Firstly, in premise 1 & 2, we can see how Al-Ghazali problematizes the “quantification” of “God is one” by rejecting that He is a sort of being of which only one exemplar does exist: ‘one’ as numerical – God is neither one nor many, but He is a wholly unique kind of being that is beyond the system of counting the number of beings of that sort. As shown above, Al-Ghazali uses the sun as an analogy of the unique one. The sun would only be unique in the entire universe if no other matter had any comparable characteristic to it. Such analogy indicates well that when Al-Ghazali speaks of God as oneness, he essentially retains this ordinary meaning, namely only God alone is said to possess some specified characteristic. On the other hand, Al-Ghazali’s unique God differs from the uniqueness of other things in light of His wholeness. For Al-Ghazali, the notion of God’s uniqueness is not expressed as a unique thing in the sense of numeric numbers or empirical accidents as **uniformity**, but as an utter **wholeness**. The following example helps us to understand this point: if there are many unique lords, each would be unique in being a particular identity. But God is the Lord of lords, only God Himself is called unique in this sense. For this reason, when Al-Ghazali used the notion of God as unique one, he means not in the sense of an empirical accident, but unique in every respect.  

Secondly, Al-Ghazali also relates oneness with wholeness in his twofold idea. He argues that the oneness of God is an indivisible oneness in wholeness, or more precisely, God is a wholly indivisible being. It seems to me that here Al-Ghazali places an indistinct relationship between the **unique oneness** and **wholeness of God** in his ontological arguments for the existence of God as one. In other words, to Al-Ghazali, when describing God as a

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216 *Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence*. 142.
unique one and wholly one, in this case it is not to say that the only uniqueness of God like there is the only uniqueness of the doorbell at my apartment. To understand this metaphor, let me further elaborate this way: the uniqueness of God is not identical to the uniqueness of the doorbell, or any other unique thing in the created world. It is because of the uniqueness of the doorbell is caused, but the uniqueness of God is uncaused; the uniqueness of God is perfect, but the uniqueness of the doorbell is imperfect. The doorbell of my house is unique in the sense that it is the only doorbell I have; but there are thousand of doorbells existed in the rest of the world. Therefore, the uniqueness of my doorbell became relative. Neither is my doorbell perfect, nor inevitably it will fail to function after some years. However, God is unique because there is no other gods; and God is perfect because He never fails to be God. Therefore, God is eternally “completeness” and “wholeness.” God is not the unique doorbell; God is God, a unique wholeness of being. In addition, when describing something as unique or one, we mean that the thing has one or more specific characteristics. Now, ‘unique’ refers to any specific created thing, and the term “wholly unique” refers exclusively to God, in Al-Ghazali’s thought. This is Al-Ghazali’s formula for expressing God’s wholly uniqueness and absolute difference.

From the above premises, we could also observe Al-Ghazali’s central argument of “God is one” means the negation of anything other than Himself and the affirmation of His essence. In other words, there is no other gods before one God. To know the wholeness of God concerns the relationship between divine predicates and divine essence, as divine attributes are “not identical, but not different” with divine essence.” It should be evident then, that for Al-Ghazali, God’s uniqueness is an utter difference of nature, which I believe is called the Wholly Unique One. This concept of Al-Ghazali is also explicitly demonstrated in his assertion that the existence of God most high and holy does neither belong to a single substance, nor a contingent property. In other words, Al-Ghazali contends that God is neither like anything nor is anything like Him; which it is connected to his understanding of divine attributes. In his Iqtisad, he indicates such an understanding by saying,

All contingent things, their substances and accidents, which occur in the essences of living beings and inanimate, occur through God’s power and that He is unique in their creation, and not one of the created things occurs through another [i.e. none by contingent power] but rather all occur through God’s power.

As shown above, Al-Ghazali carefully expressed the distinction between essence and attributes by placing God as divine power over against human-contingent power. I will return to the issues of contingency and necessary later in Section 3.3.4.

Thirdly, for Al-Ghazali, “God’s utter uniqueness” means that God’s uniqueness is incomparable. Such a unique nature does not necessary imply God’s uniformity, but wholeness. To put it in another way, Al-Ghazali considers God’s uniqueness as dissimilar to any worldly thing that also would be unique without division. For Al-Ghazali, God is both unique and whole in a sense that is not merely our numerical system. In other words, Al-Ghazali is denying the plurality in the divine essence through God’s uniqueness and wholeness; not “one” in a numerical way. Such a concept is repeated in Iqtisad, as well as in a slightly different form in his Tahafut. In sum, Al-Ghazali’s perception of oneness in God’s essence is not merely the numerical sense, but the concept of God’s simplicity is in an organic state of indivisible wholeness. This concept of God’s simplicity is also shown as a unique being that is incomparable with any other things. There is no equal in essence or attributes to God.

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217 See Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence, 123-24, 149-50; and Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 109-123.
218 Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence, 123-24, 149-50.
220 Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 21.
After looking into Al-Ghazali’s understanding of the nature of simplicity through the twofold perception of uniqueness and wholeness, of course, the question arises how, if God is unique and wholly one, how the divine attributes can be “parts” of a simple wholesome One? Or is it logically impossible to ascribe to Him any attributes? Thus, we have to discuss how Al-Ghazali solves the problem of attribution in his understanding of divine simplicity through his twofold idea. To this I now turn.

3.2.3 Solution: The Relation between Divine Essence/Existence and Divine Attributes

My discussion in this section will proceed as follows. I begin this section with a brief account of the various treatments of the doctrine of divine simplicity in the context of the Medieval Age, making clear why Al-Ghazali finds the Philosophers (together with the Mu’tazilites) incoherent in interpreting it in terms of general causality. I then turn to the task of developing how Al-Ghazali provides his genuine causality, in particular – “the non-necessary causality” – the only way of rendering the doctrine of divine simplicity in a more coherent way.

Let us revisit the sketches of various treatments of the problem of attribution in Islamic tradition before we explore the solution of Al-Ghazali. I first identify the problem, or key question, of the relationship between the essence and existence of God from the history of Islamic tradition. This problem is also a key question being raised by Al-Ghazali in relation to the doctrine of divine simplicity in his Tahafut: can the existence of God and His unity be known rationally from the existence of the world? This question has been raised first by an Ash’arite theologian (al-Baqillani, d. 1013) against the Mu’tazilites who sought to vindicate human rationality as a means to know God. Al-Baqillani argued that only through the premise that the world has been created, a creator – God – is needed logically. It appears that in the argument of a First Cause the conclusion that God exists is based upon the principle of causality, that says that only if a cause (God) occurs, its effect (the world) would follow. This general principle of causality can be expressed as follows:

A is the cause of B, or:

The occurrence of A causes the occurrence of B.

In order to safeguard divine essence as one, the Mu’tazillah school holds to this general principle of causality, and holds that God is a simple being without a quiddity of essence and necessary existence, or more precisely that there is no composition of existence and quiddity in God. In other words, to Mu’tazilites, God’s attributes have to be reduced into divine essence. Thus the argument of the Mu’tazilites’ is not that God has no attributes, but that divine attributes are real attributes in the divine essence. In his Tahafut, Al-Ghazali begins with providing a definition of the philosopher’s (Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina) or Mu’tazillah’s Simple God: the necessary being (God) must be one if by necessity God is the primary cause. Let us trace how Al-Ghazali understands the Mu’tazilite “uncaused is uncaused per se or per causam,” and how he rejects their views. Al-Ghazali indicates that their idea of causality is mistaken. The rule “what is uncaused is uncaused in per se or per causam,” implies that things exist by necessity ‘either essentially or derived from a cause.’ Such a view, according to Al-Ghazali, does not distinguish between the necessity of existence of things and the necessity of necessary being (God). Because of this lack of

221 See Section 3.1 and Chapter 2.
222 Fakhry, A History of Islamic, 215-23.
223 Fakhry, A History of Islamic, 217.
224 We can see this principle of causality in Ibn Sina (or Avicenna in Section 2.2.4) and Al-Farabi (See Section 2:3.2).
225 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 96-99.
226 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 96-99.
distinction between necessity in things and in God, the Philosophers’ conclude that there is no composition of attributes in God, or more precisely, that God is identical with His attributes. 227

Let me summarise what Al-Ghazali identifies as the five major characteristics of the Philosophers’ divine unity (that the First Principle is one):228 (1) incorporeal; (2) neither form nor matter; (3) all attributes of God are reduced to His divine essence; (4) there is no composition of genus and species or difference in God, and (5) there is no composition of existence and quiddity in God. These five characteristics of divine unity in the Philosophers’ argument are not meant to deny the divine attributes nor the plurality of negations and relation, but to deny the reality of divine attributes that exist in the divine essence. 229 Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali asserts that such philosophers’ arguments for divine unity are “a groundless way of arguing,” “a strange notion,” or more precisely, a “fundamentally wrong division” to prove that God is one.230 For Al-Ghazali, the assertion of seven divine attributes (warranted by the Koran) does not necessarily destroy the simplicity of divine essence. In fact, the Mu’tazillah school argues for divine simplicity by reducing the seven attributions ‘into’ the simplicity of divine essence; Al-Ghazali rejects this view as incoherent with the Koran.

Al-Ghazali’s Solution: God as the cause of causes

As promised, let us turn now to the task of developing how Al-Ghazali develops his understanding of genuine causality, and in particular “the non-necessary causality”, which he thinks is the only way of rendering the doctrine of divine simplicity in a more coherent way.

Let us revisit the general principle of causality:

A is the cause of B, or:

The occurrence of A causes the occurrence of B.

However, Al-Ghazali’s idea of causality is not totally opposed to the one above, but he rejects the idea that each connection between what looks like the relation between a cause and an effect always is a necessary link, in Al-Ghazali’s words:

[T]he connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary. Take any two things. This is not That; nor can That be This. The affirmation of one does not imply the affirmation of the other; nor does its denial imply the denial of the other. The existence of one is not necessitated by the existence of the other; nor its non-existence by the non-existence of the other. 231

Here, Al-Ghazali points out that the principle of cause and effect does not need to be understood in the way in which it is viewed habitually, namely, that cause and effect are necessarily connected. For Al-Ghazali, God’s uniqueness is related to His unique essence and uniquely necessary existence (wajid al-wujud). The uniqueness of God is demonstrated in His being the ultimate necessary cause over His creation (contingent causes) through chains of causality. And so we can understand that the existence of God is the ultimate cause of

228 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 99-100.
229 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 102-108, especially in 102, Al-Ghazali summarizes the Philosophers’ doctrine of divine simplicity in this way: “[t]he essence of the First Principle is one. But a plurality of names for this one essence arises either from the relation of things to it, or from its own relation to things, or from the negation of things as its predicates. The negation of something as a predicate does not necessitate plurality in the subject. Nor does a relation indicate the plurality”; compare also to Al-Ghazali’s refutation of their denial of the divine attributes in Problem VI, 109-124.
230 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 96-97.
231 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut.185.
each cause, while God himself is uncaused.\textsuperscript{232} The next question, of course, is whether Al-Ghazali’s causal theory is capable of offering a conceptually coherent account of the relationship between the uniqueness of God and His necessary cause. In the following sections, I attempt to explore Al-Ghazali’s discussion of the principle of causality, and to identify how Al-Ghazali’s causation has played an important role in the shaping of his concept of divine essence and existence. Such exploration and identification are presented by explaining Al-Ghazali’s argument, in his treatise of \textit{Tahafut}, of the uniqueness and wholeness of God in relation to divine essence and necessary existence – God is the cause of causes –. It is necessary to begin our exploration by, first, understanding the usage of \textit{necessity} and second, \textbf{the relationship between necessity and causation}.

\textit{The Relationship between Necessary Being and Causation}

In our discussion of the relationship between necessary being and causation, I first need to peruse what Al-Ghazali meant when he claimed that God’s essence is uncaused, and how he justifies this claim. As has been shown, Al-Ghazali’s conception of causality is beyond the ordinary principle of causality. According to Al-Ghazali, the ordinary principle of causality is not a valid argument. For Al-Ghazali, it is not necessary to demonstrate the connection between cause and effect in order to prove the existence of a Necessary Being (God). To grasp the concept of God in relation to the causation of Al-Ghazali, let us revisit the general principle sketched in 3.3.2:

A is the cause of B, or :
the occurrence of A\((cause)\) causes the occurrence of B \((effect)\)

(For example, fire as the cause of burning cotton)

It appears that the above \textit{cause and effect} principle is a general philosophical assumption. Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali contended that, “the connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary.”\textsuperscript{233} Al-Ghazali gives the example of “the burning of a piece of cotton at the time of its contact with fire”\textsuperscript{234} to explain his argument. On one hand, Al-Ghazali admitted that the above example indeed demonstrates the logical system of cause and effect, as there is a causal relationship between the cotton and the fire. But on the other hand, Al-Ghazali opposed the Philosophers who conclude from this example that fire \textit{necessarily causes} the burning of cotton.\textsuperscript{235} Al-Ghazali points out that the Philosophers are only able to indicate the occurrence of burning at the time when the cotton is contacted with the fire, but they are unable to show what the cause of the fire is.

When Al-Ghazali claims that “the connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary,”\textsuperscript{236} he is saying that “the cause of a natural happening \textit{sometimes} is not necessary” and therefore “the connection between cause and effect is not necessary.” It is worth noting that Al-Ghazali does not deny or reject the principle of cause and effect; rather he points out that cause and effect are not necessarily interdependent. This is clearly seen in his example of cotton and fire. Al-Ghazali observes that the fire is only an inanimate thing without will, and only the ultimate reason for the burning of the cotton causes the fire in the first place. Since fire is an inanimate thing with no action, or more precisely it is not a personal thing with a will, Al-Ghazali points out that we are only able to observe that the cotton is burned when the effect (cotton) is in contact \textit{with} the cause (fire), but not the

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{232}] Al-Ghazali, \textit{Tahafut}, 185.
\item [\textsuperscript{233}] Al-Ghazali, \textit{Tahafut}, 185.
\item [\textsuperscript{234}] Al-Ghazali, \textit{Tahafut}, 185.
\item [\textsuperscript{235}] Al-Ghazali, \textit{Tahafut}, 185.
\item [\textsuperscript{236}] Al-Ghazali, \textit{Tahafut}, 185.
\end{itemize}
effect by the cause (God). For this reason, on one hand, Al-Ghazali affirmed that there is indeed a continuous connection between cause and effect, but on the other hand, he also asserted, that which we observe from past experience does not mean that this is always the case.\textsuperscript{237} Al-Ghazali explains the reason why this should not always be the case: the existence of cause and effect is undeniably the case due to the prior decree of God. To show the connection between God’s decree and a miracle in Al-Ghazali’s thought, I would say that Al-Ghazali attempts to demonstrate the decree of God in the relationship of cause and effect. For Al-Ghazali, God is God, He is able to use the natural way for causes to have effects all the time, but He is also able to perform miracles sometimes; God who creates and sustains the world in a natural and in a miraculous way side by side; the world is not necessary in itself, and incapable to separate causes and effects. But on the other hand, it is within the divine power to create a sense of fullness within the human person without eating, to quench thirst without water, and so on, and deal with all connected things.\textsuperscript{238}

Therefore, Al-Ghazali’s discussion of necessity and causality does not undermine his view of the uniqueness and wholeness of God; rather it upholds the truth of God Himself as the ultimate cause. This idea can also be found in Al-Ghazali’s proof that miracles are possible.

### Necessity

In his explanation of necessity, Al-Ghazali makes a distinction between the Philosophers and his own usage of this term. Al-Ghazali showed that the Philosophers’ usage of “necessary being” is based upon two arbitrary assumptions: (a) the necessary being is a cause from certain consequences/efficient effects that determine its existence; (b) the necessary being is proven by the created creatures on the basis of their own categories.\textsuperscript{239} Al-Ghazali indicates that such assumptions were derived from the Philosophers’ argument that “every quiddity which is an existent has already received plurality, since there is existence in addition to quiddity.”\textsuperscript{240} However, Al-Ghazali refutes such assumptions of the Philosophers as they had against the real existence of divine attributes and the genus-

division (or division its definition).\textsuperscript{241} One may observe from the above mentioned that the Philosophers who sought to safeguard God’s simpleness hold that God’s existence cannot be related to His essence.\textsuperscript{242} This became the reason for these Philosophers to deny the existence of attributes, and to reduce them into God’s essence. Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali rejects these assumptions because they are incompatible with the oneness of God and the real existence of divine attributes.\textsuperscript{243} For Al-Ghazali, “what the Philosophers’ say is like saying, ‘Existence, but no existent; and that is a contradiction in terms.’”\textsuperscript{244} It will be useful, therefore, to have before us a few characteristic aspects of Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity in relation to the divine attributes. Here is an important statement from Al-Ghazali: “the ‘one’ existent is intelligible, and there is no existent without an essence [or quiddity], but the existence of the essence is not incompatible with oneness.”\textsuperscript{245} In this statement, Al-Ghazali attempts to explain that the oneness of divine essence is not identical to His existence, and Al-Ghazali further asserts that such existence of essence will not necessary demolish the

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\textsuperscript{238} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 186.

\textsuperscript{239} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 133.

\textsuperscript{240} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 133.

\textsuperscript{241} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 133.

\textsuperscript{242} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 133.

\textsuperscript{243} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 133.

\textsuperscript{244} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 133.

\textsuperscript{245} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 134.
oneness of God. In other words, God is a necessary existence with a quiddity of essence. I will presents below Al-Ghazali’s explanations and arguments for his treatment of the problem of attribution.

For Al-Ghazali, “God is uncaused,” in the sense of pure negation. In his words, “a necessary being is that here is no cause of its existence, and of its uncaused character.” Here, Al-Ghazali argues that the pure negation is for describing a necessary being. He further explains, for this reason that pure negation itself has no cause, so we cannot look forward to seeking whether this pure negation is per se or per causam. According to Al-Ghazali, in his words “the meaning which emerges from the denial of the cause of being, and which is a pure negation, cannot itself be called caused or uncaused.” Thus, Al-Ghazali concludes in this way, when we call God a necessary being / uncaused in itself, it is not necessary to imply that nothing else can possibly possess the attribute of necessity. In other words, the Philosopher’s arguments only drive into a dilemma of contradiction: as one will imply that God is one with nothing else and without any real existence of divine attributes. For Al-Ghazali, this is not supposed to be the case if one insisted that the existence of divine attributes will pluralize divine essence.

Al-Ghazali, on the other hand, described ‘necessity’ in the expression “God is a necessary existence” (wajid al-wujud Al-Ghazali) so that it ‘only means the denial of cause.’ It seems that for Al-Ghazali, the existence of necessary being is not dependent on effect; it is independent of effect. In other words, the relation between necessity and effect is not interdependent as other philosophers have understood it. Here, Al-Ghazali asserted that necessary existence has and needs no cause. The next exploration we need to conduct is whether denial of a cause is related to God’s essential nature or accidental features. In order to do so, we must shift to the discussion of the relationship between necessary being and causation. To this I now proceed.

**Argument for the Possibility of Miracles**

Al-Ghazali used his argument that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect to show that God can interfere in a natural setting of cause and effect, producing results that did not exist in past human experience. Such intervention is called a miracle or act according to God’s eternal decree. It appears that for Al-Ghazali, the connection between cause and effect is a result of God’s power and His will that preceded their (the cause and effect) existence. If one follows another, it is because God created them in this way, not because the connection is necessary in itself.

The same contradiction occurs in the Philosophers’ arguments (particularly in Neo-Platonist thought, see Chapter 2). On one hand, they claim that ‘only one proceeds from one;’ in which God is a mere cause which necessitates the world by His nature; but on the other hand, they contend that the Principle (God) is one and the world is composed of different things. To Al-Ghazali, in these philosophers’ argumentation it is impossible to prove that God is the agent and the maker of the world; but only leads into a contradiction. Indeed, in Al-Ghazali’s view, the philosophers’ ideas “only one proceeds from one” and “whatever

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246 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 134.
247 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 134.
248 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 96.
249 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 97.
250 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 96-97.
251 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 97.
252 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 97.
253 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 135.
254 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, 185-195.
255 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 73.
proceeds from Him is a necessary consequence” end up in a picture of a God who has no will and no attributes at all. Further on, only a series of simple entities could proceed from God’s oneness; which is exactly the argument Al-Ghazali contends. Al-Ghazali uses an illustration to further explain his contention: humans are composed of body and soul (Form and Matter). He argues that “the soul has not originated from the body, nor the body from the soul, but both have emanated from eternal causes;” similarly, “the Principle is simple; whereas the effects are characterized by composition. And this is inconceivable, unless the simple and the composite were to meet.” These statements show that Al-Ghazali and the Philosophers to a certain extent stand in the same position on the aspect of the First Principle as one.

Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali points out that in spite of their affirmation of the plurality of negations and relations in the essence of the First Principle as one, they are still unable to prove all divine attributes in terms of negation and relation. As it is only through denying divine attributes in terms of negation and relation, the Philosophers are able to affirm divine simplicity. In other words, there is a contradiction between divine attributes and divine essence. But according to Al-Ghazali, it is impossible that that divine attributes and divine essence are co-eternal, without violating the wholeness and uniqueness of God (the twofold idea of divine simplicity). He asserts that the seven divine attributes are identical with divine essence. Thus, “all the Divine attributes are ultimately to be identified with Divine essence;” “His power and will and knowledge are one and the same as His essence.” Al-Ghazali also explains the uniqueness of divine attributes by pointing out the difference between divine knowledge and human knowledge, and he indicates that Divine knowledge is not like our imperfect knowledge. After explaining divine attributes in terms of negation, Al-Ghazali moves on to explain divine attributes in terms of relation.

Al-Ghazali explains the relationship between divine attributes and essence by giving the following example, in fact Aristotle’s Metaphysics models (see Chapter 2): “the knower, the knowledge and the object of knowledge form a unity.” This example shows that: as the knowledge and the object of knowledge proceed from the knower, the knower contains knowledge and object of knowledge; yet this does not pluralize the knower. Another explanation is given by Al-Ghazali, “the generosity is an expression for His being – in relation to the action, i.e., generosity, and in privation of a purpose. Hence it does not mean any plurality in His essence.” Such a claim, Al-Ghazali argues, does not build on any speculative grounds but is simply submissiveness to the authority of the prophets in regard to the fundamental of these things. Therefore, God’s [attributes, as a wholly undivided attribute] is made in terms of uniqueness and wholeness, without plurality in essence; and

256 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 74.
257 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 73.
258 An-Ghazali, Tahafut. 74.
259 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 75.
260 See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 102-108, especially in 102, Al-Ghazali summarizes the Philosophers’ doctrine of divine simplicity in this way: “[t]he essence of the First Principle is one. But a plurality of names for this one essence arises either from the relation of things to it, or from its own relation to things, or from the negation of things as its predicates. The negation of something as a predicate does not necessitate plurality in the subject. Nor does a relation indicate the plurality” also compare to Al-Ghazali’s refutation of their denial of the divine attributes in Problem VI, 109-124.
261 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 105.
262 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 106.
263 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 105.
264 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 79.
265 Al-Ghazali, Tahafut. 106.
affirming divine attributes altogether does not involve plurality and contingency in divine essence.\textsuperscript{266}

In sum, Al-Ghazali’s understandings of necessity and God as the cause of all acts can be summarized by the following premises:\textsuperscript{267}

**Premise 1:** Al-Ghazali affirmed that the nature of the Philosophers’ conception of causality is logically possible, but it is not sufficient to prove that God is uncaused.

**Premise 2:** Al-Ghazali stated that the nature of causality is a way of natural process in the world, but God, as the maker of the world, is the real agent of causation and able to act in both a natural and supernatural way (miracles), according to His will.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the Al-Ghazali’s idea of causality does not reject the natural principle of cause and effect, but denies that this idea of causality can be applied to God as maker of the world.

In this section we have seen how Al-Ghazali’s solution to the problem of attribution in divine simplicity is related to his argument for causality.

### 3.2.4 Conclusion Concerning the Nature of Simplicity

Let us now finally summarize the results of our examination of Al-Ghazali’s central nature of divine simplicity. It is difficult if not impossible to offer a definition of divine simplicity in Al-Ghazali’s thought, and in doing so, we came to the conclusion that Al-Ghazali’s conceptualizes the nature of God’s simplicity in terms of unique and wholeness (the twofold idea of God’s simplicity). What Al-Ghazali meant by conceiving God as unique and whole is, as far as I see, that God is beyond a numerically oneness, God is God; and His oneness to Al-Ghazali is not a numerically oneness, because He is wholly unique Being. This account of the twofold idea of divine simplicity in Al-Ghazali is of crucial importance for him to solve the problem of the relation between divine attributes and divine essence. Thus, when Al-Ghazali describes God as having divine attributes, he would mean that these attributes are multiply coeternal with Him and *superadded* to the essence (note: unlike Muta’zillites, Al-Ghazali does not reduce divine attributes to God’s essence. For Al-Ghazali, the seven divine attributes are superadded to divine essence, but do not belong to divine essence).

More precisely, Al-Ghazali safely explains it this way: divine attributes are not the essence but rather the point of the essence. In other words, Al-Ghazali’s understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity is that His utter uniqueness provides the proof for the existence of a being who is without a cause, and such uniqueness of God is not a denial of the multiplicity of divine attributes. Besides, we can also understand another crucial notion that Al-Ghazali uses to explain the relationship between divine attributes and divine essence, namely “a little similar but not identical.” Such notion is important, because if we are unaware of this “a little similar but not identical,” we may easily conceive divine attributes to divine essence. For example, Mu’tazillites’ conception of divine simplicity has identified all positive attributes of God as divine essence. Indeed, Al-Ghazali’s version of divine simplicity has solved the problem of the relation between divine essence and attributes, because he is able to safeguard God’s uniqueness but not to forsake His attributes. Al-Ghazali’s solution, it seems to me, renders a clearer distinction between the Ash’arite and Mu’tazilite positions on

\textsuperscript{266} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 109-124. \\
\textsuperscript{267} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 185-195.
divine simplicity, because he introduces a definition of divine simplicity that is capable of linking the “gap” between divine attributes and divine essence. Isn’t Al-Ghazali making a defence of the doctrine of divine simplicity in orthodox Islam or Ash’arite traditions? According to my understanding, Al-Ghazali’s version of divine simplicity does represent a version of orthodox Islam, and such a version also plays a pivotal position in the Sunni Islam by demonstrating twofold conception to be ascribed to God’s simplicity when He is called a simple God.

In this section, we have undertaken the important task of spelling out what the nature of divine simplicity means in Al-Ghazali’s works. In doing this we have concentrated upon the notions of “unique” and “wholeness” as a twofold idea of the concept of divine simplicity. Al-Ghazali’s solution on this specific problem of divine essence and attributes also opens the door to answer further questions that are related to attribution of predicates to God. Those discussions put Al-Ghazali’s understanding of God’s uniqueness and wholeness to its supreme test whether they stand in those further debates. Therefore, we now will discuss the relevance of Al-Ghazali’s view of divine simplicity in relation to other theological issues in order to examine more closely what exactly is secured by Al-Ghazali’s argument.

3.3 THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN ANALYSING AL-GHAZALI’S DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

3.3.1 Introduction
The discussion in Section 3.2 led us to discover that in Al-Ghazali’s thought, the nature of divine simplicity is a twofold idea – uniqueness and wholeness. We also in Section 3.2.3 explored that in comparison to the Philosophers’ view (mainly from neo-platonism) of divine simplicity, Al-Ghazali’s version of divine simplicity appears to be internally more coherent. Now, although Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity is entirely accepted as an appropriate doctrine by the Sunni tradition, we must shift our attention to the question of whether Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity is also compatible with other theological issues of Islam. In Islam, the following theological issues are the main three difficulties or related problems that arise in the doctrine of divine simplicity. I examine whether these theological issues have reinforced or weakened Al-Ghazali’s claim of a wholly unique God. To this examination I now proceed.

3.3.2 Divine Simplicity in relation to Transcendence: the Unknowable God and God’s Creation
After discussing Al-Ghazali’s causality in Section 3.2.3, we are entering into another relevant issue of causality, namely, the relationship between God and God’s world. Let us restate briefly the ground we have covered thus far regarding Al-Ghazali’s conception of causality. As shown in Section 3.2.3, we must identify two aspects of the relationship between cause and effect in Al-Ghazali’s conception of causality; let me summarize it as follows:

- It is a habitual connection between cause and effect.
- It is not necessary a habitual connection between cause and effect.

With this in mind, we are able to understand what Al-Ghazali intends when he speaks about genuine causality. In other words, Al-Ghazali does not deny that it is a habitual connection between cause and effect, but he only states that it is not necessary. In Section 3.2.3, we have seen how Al-Ghazali with his formulation of causality is able to solve the problem of attribution in divine simplicity. Now, we turn to the problem of the relationship between God’s simplicity and His multiplicity of creations in this section. How can God be utterly
unique (the utter uniqueness of God implies that He is unknowable) and create the multiplicity of the world? How can He have uniqueness and be unknowable to His creation, yet like something and be knowable to His creation? In this section, I attempt to work within the framework of Al-Ghazali’s conception of causality to answer this problem of the relationship between God’s simplicity and His creation. To do so, I begin my discussion of this issue with a short outline of the view of Al-Ghazali’s interlocutors (Mu’tazilites/rationalism in general and Greek Neo-Platonism in particular), and then discuss whether Al-Ghazali’s idea of causality in relation to divine simplicity is able to solve the problem of the relationship between God’s simplicity and His relation to creatures.

In his first proposition in *Tahafut*, Al-Ghazali reacts at length against the eternity of the world as professed by the Philosophers and Islamic Neo-Platonists. Under Al-Ghazali interpretation, the Philosophers’ response to the relationship between God and His created world is that, in Al-Ghazali’s words:

> [the eternity of the world] always coexisted with God (exalted to He) as His effect which was concurrent with Him in time – concurrent as an effect is with the cause... – and that God’s priority to the world is the priority of the cause of the effect, priority in essence and rank, not in time.

The position of the Philosophers shown in this passage is the model of the principle of general causality, in which the cause and effect is always arrived at the stage of necessary connectness. For instance, if God is eternal, then His effect (the world) is also eternal (e.g., the Philosophers claim that the procession of a temporal world from an eternal being is impossible); and as such, the concept of necessary connection between cause and effect also establishes the order in the created world as a sequence of necessarily connected events, then such a connected sequence of cause and effect. Such a claim, Al-Ghazali says, is not consistent with the creating power of God; these philosophers, Al-Ghazali says, make the idea of God as an Agent and the Maker of the world into a metaphor (or mythological story). In addition, Al-Ghazali also points out that the Philosophers who based their views on “self-evident facts” go astray in that they presuppose a valid and therefore clear analogy between the Divine will and the human will, Divine knowledge and human knowledge, and so forth and so on. It is because of these deceiving comparisons, the Philosophers assert that the world is eternal, just as her eternal Creator. These equations also raise the problem of attribution in divine simplicity, because they derive also the ideas of simplicity and of how the divine ‘has’ attributes from the way in which created things ‘have’ attributes. From this understanding of simplicity the Philosophers have to identify all divine attributes with the divine essence itself (I will discuss this issue in Section 3.3.3). Al-Ghazali rejects the...

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268 See Section 3.2, when Al-Ghazali speak about the nature of divine simplicity, though he does not using the term unknowable to describe God’s nature, but with his use of the twofold idea – the wholeness and uniqueness – to speak about God’s simplicity he has indeed proposed the idea of an incomprehensible or unknowable characteristic of God.

269 According to the Koran, the account of God’s act and His names often share the similar characteristics with His creation (human) also, but never in the same sense. For example, divine will and human will, divine knowledge and human knowledge, etc. See Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 26.


275 See the discussion of the Philosophers’ confusion in saying that God is the agent and the Maker of the world in Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 63-88; compare to Fakhry, *History of Islamic*, 229-231.

application of the epistemology in relation to the finite world to the knowledge of the divine and asserts that the divine attributes that are revealed in the Koran differ in a fundamental way from human attributes and that the way in which they are ‘owned’ by God also differs from the way in which humans ‘own’ properties. \(^{277}\) If I am not mistaken, to Al-Ghazali, divine attributes and human attributes are similar but not identical.

Now, this implies that the relation between God and His creation also differs from the relation between what we make and the things made by us. So, let us turn to what Al-Ghazali says about God’s relationship with His world. This section will not offer a comprehensive discussion that takes into account all the issues involved with respect to Al-Ghazali’s understanding of God and of His world. Rather, the focus is on unfolding Al-Ghazali’s accounts of divine simplicity, with respect to the transcendence/unknowable God and the world. This will be accomplished by discussing the following two questions. First, if God is an independent “Necessary Being,” and “all things” (the world) rely upon Him as cause, the question that naturally follows is, how Al-Ghazali conceives the relationship between God and His world within the frame of his doctrine of divine simplicity? Second, according to Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity, if God is an utterly unique being (as shown in Section 3.2.2), it follows that the concept of God must be completely unknowable. As Al-Ghazali introduces it: “WE BESEECH God, in the name of His greatness which transcends all limits, and His munificence which outruns all measures.” \(^{278}\) Here, Al-Ghazali explicitly shows that it is impossible for anyone to really know God, or more precisely, that God is an unknowable being. Indeed, this concept of an unknowable God is no doubt the most important element of Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity. The question that arises is: if God is utterly unique and unknowable, is it possible that a human (part of the World) can know God, even to a limited extent? Inevitably Al-Ghazali has to interpret ‘knowing God’ in such a way that humans are unable to know God in His totality, and that they can know Him to a certain degree that is also appropriate for them. Al-Ghazali’s understandings of God and God’s world can be derived from his treatise Tahafut, Problems I and II. I first reconstruct Al-Ghazali’s premises that disagree with the Philosophers and how he opposes the philosophers in order to offer a ground upon which to begin our exploration:

**Premise 1:** It is not true that the world is originated independently from God and, therefore, co-exists next to God; \(^{279}\)

**Premise 2:** It is not true that the world is neither originated nor coexistent with God; \(^{280}\)

**Premise 3:** The world has a beginning in time (originated) but does not exist independently from God; \(^{281}\)

**Premise 4:** God is a “[B]eing which is neither outside the world nor inside it;” \(^{282}\)

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\(^{277}\) See Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, 26.

\(^{278}\) Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, Introduction, I.

\(^{279}\) Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, Problem 1:13-53: such arguments are (i) “the procession of a temporal (being) from an eternal (being) is absolutely impossible;... and the world has been proved to have existed, and the impossibility of its beginning in time has been shown, it follows that the world is eternal;” (ii) “a comparison of the Divine will to our [human] inclination or will.”

\(^{280}\) Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, Problem 1:13-53.

\(^{281}\) Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, Problem 1:13-53: the argument is like this: “before the existence of the world, the Willer existed: the will existed, and the relation of the will to its object existed;”

\(^{282}\) Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, 26.
Premise 5: “God’s singularity precludes a rival, not a singularity which precludes the co-existence of the contingent creatures with Him.”

First, Al-Ghazali argues against the Philosophers’ perception of God’s relation to the world in Premises 1, 2 and 3 (as discussed above). Clearly, there is a fundamental disparity between Al-Ghazali’s view and the Philosophers’ conception of God and God’s world. The Philosophers’ understanding of the eternity of the world is rooted in the principle of causality. For them, since the world is the result of the necessary causality of God’s essence, then, the world as a whole is coeternal with His existence. Furthermore, they argue that since the world was created, or has a beginning in time, then it must be coeternal with God. On the other hand, Al-Ghazali contends that the world was created in time by an eternal decree of God. Here, Al-Ghazali does not deny the general principle of causality (namely events in the world are necessarily connected in nature). He only contends that such principle of causality cannot be always applied. For Al-Ghazali, not all events in the world are causally and necessarily related, such as “fire and cotton” (example as shown in Section 3.2.3). Besides, Al-Ghazali asserts that their argument “the world has its origin in and is co-existent with God” is not able to safeguard the simplicity of God, but rather produces multiplicity in God. Therefore, Al-Ghazali rejected the Philosophers’ view and offered his own concept of the relationship between God and God’s world, as shown in premise 4. Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali raises another problem: what kind of relationship is between the characteristics of the One and those in the finite world – similar but not identical? For example, God’s will and human’s willing.

Second, what exactly is Al-Ghazali’s conception of the relationship between God and the world? Al-Ghazali’s claim that “God is a being which is neither outside the world nor inside it” (premise 4) is not a negation of God’s relationship to the world. Because, if it were, it would follow that the question of whether God is or is not inside the world, is not a necessary question concerning God’s essential nature. When Al-Ghazali described the relationship between God and God’s world as “God is outside the world” or “God is inside the world,” he pointed out that it may well be equally improper to answer the question. As Al-Ghazali observed, most people (mainly the Philosophers) make a false comparison between the eternal God and the temporal world. Al-Ghazali contends that “the eternal will does not resemble temporal intention … comparison of the Divine to the human will is as false an analogy as that between Divine and human knowledge.” Al-Ghazali asserts that there is a fundamental difference between the function and nature of the divine attributes: “[w]ill is an attribute of which the function – rather, nature – is to distinguish something from its like.” In other words, we must avoid this misconception of the relationship between the function and nature in divine attributes by knowing the distinction between the nature and the function of the divine attributes. For Al-Ghazali, the relationship between God and His world is such that God is neither identical with, nor different from, His world.

Third, Al-Ghazali further shows that the idea of emanation is contrary to God’s simplicity. In his words, Al-Ghazali says, “what we call inadmissible is the procession of the first temporal being from the Eternal.” Such understanding demands another temporal
being. Al-Ghazali stated that the Philosophers often misconnect the nature of time with the existence of God. For Al-Ghazali, what makes the eternal God “was” and the temporal world “was not” is because “God is prior to the world and time.”291 In other words, Al-Ghazali indicates that the world has been created, and God is the creator of the world. God exists before there was world and time. For this reason, Al-Ghazali asserted that “[b]y His priority we mean that His being was the only being (before the existence of the world),” “God was, and the world Jesus was not [here, ‘was’ belongs to the past]; and afterwards, God was and Jesus was together with Him [here, ‘was/will’ be refers to the future].”292 “God had an existence, while the world was not with Him.”293 Al-Ghazali argued that God’s world was created by God’s will (God’s eternal decree) and that time itself is also God’s creation. Therefore, there is no change in God’s essence (the difference between the “eternal” God and the “temporal” world). In premise 5, Al-Ghazali continues to explain divine simplicity. Al-Ghazali asserted that God’s singularity must be singular in essence, but His creation (the world) is not necessary.294 Again, Al-Ghazali explicitly distinguishes between God and His world. As such, God’s relation to the world is conceived of according to Al-Ghazali’s pattern of “not identical but not totally different.”

We conclude, then, that Al-Ghazali’s arguments for God and His relation to His world established and elucidated the compatibility of God’s uniqueness and wholeness with His World. We are able to see in the relationship between God and the world that God is a simple God, and the world is not. The world belongs to Him, but God does not belong to His world. This account of the relation between God and His world enables and prepares us to proceed to the following section that focuses on exploring the relationship between the divine essence and the divine attributes. Nevertheless, there is another aspect of Al-Ghazali’s argument that requires our attention, namely, his conception of divine simplicity in relation to divine names and divine attributes. To this I now turn.

3.3.3 Divine simplicity in relation to Divine Names and Divine Attributes

In Section 3.2.2, we sketched Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity, as well as showed that the relationship between the divine essence and the divine attributes appears to be the main problem of Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity. Now, we are in the stage of looking into such problems and exploring how Al-Ghazali solves them. Let me first stretch the problem in a more detailed account. Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity is at stake, here, due to two fairly distinct questions that occur in it. Firstly, on one hand, he presents his arguments for God’s knowability by explicating the meaning of attributes (divine predicates and their properties) and the beautiful names of God. On the other hand, he points out that God’s simplicity entails that God’s being is unknowable. Or, more precisely, God’s simplicity is neither identical to, nor different from, the world. As we have seen, on one hand, Al-Ghazali makes a sharp distinction between God and the world; on the other hand, he relates God with the His world. As such, Al-Ghazali implies that for human beings God is an unknowable or incomprehensible God. How could these two parts, which seem to contradict each other, both work in Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity? This section is devoted to examining how Al-Ghazali solves this apparent problem in his doctrine of divine simplicity.

In the following, I first explore Al-Ghazali’s explanation of the seven essential attributes that are predicated to God in Islam, namely, attributes or names that can and cannot...
be predicated to God. I then follow with an answer to the question that was laid out in the beginning of this chapter: does Al-Ghazali’s twofold idea of the doctrine of divine simplicity (namely the uniqueness and the wholeness of God) work in the discussion of divine names and divine attributes? What does Al-Ghazali mean when he claims that divine names and divine attributes are one, and are the same as divine essence?

**Unity among Ninety-Nine Divine Names**

I begin to discuss Al-Ghazali’s view of the unity of the ninety-nine divine names by exploring how Al-Ghazali secures his understanding of divine transcendence as “unified” when he insists that the ninety-nine beautiful names of God are permissible to describe God Most High. In Islam, many of God’s attributes are described in what is known as the “ninety-nine beautiful names of God.” In other words, many names of God are named after the attributes of the divine nature. For this reason, it would be inaccurate to speak of God’s names without describing the divine attributes. Al-Ghazali’s commentary on the divine names, entitled *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God (al-Maqsad al-asna fi sharh asma Allah al-husna)*, is famous for its mention of the “beautiful names” of God. Al-Ghazali states that the proper names and divine attributes, which predicate God, are “the means” by which God praises Himself. Through God’s proper names and attributes, humanity is able to know who God is, yet humanity is unable to comprehend what God is.²⁹⁵ Al-Ghazali explains that,

The name [1] can be the same as the thing named, as we say of God most high that He is essence and existent; and that the name can also be other than the thing named, as in our saying that God is creator and provider. For these indicate creating and providing, which are other for Him. So it can be such that the name [2] may not be said either to be the same as the thing named or other than it, as when we say ‘knowing’ and ‘powerful’: both refer to knowing and power, yet attributes of God cannot be said to be the same as God or other than Him.

The above statements show that when Al-Ghazali speaks about subordinating divine names and divine attributes to God’s unitary nature, he brings up the issue of how God, who revealed Himself to be One, also manifests a multiplicity of names and attributes. It is worth noting that, for Al-Ghazali, terms such as “the name,” “the named” and “the naming are both distinctiveness and indistinctness.”²⁹⁶

The following are the premises we can observe from the above statement.

**Premise 1:** ‘x is the same as y’ or ‘x is other than y’;

**Premise 2:** the name is identical with or different from the thing named;

**Premise 3:** the real existence is similar to the existence;

**Premise 4:** the word, the knowledge, and the object are three distinct things: though, they mutually conform, and correspond;

**Premise 5:** words were posited primarily and posited secondarily;

**Premise 6:** the name is simply the word posited for indicating: a positor (namer), a positing (naming), and the thing posited (named);

**Premise 7:** “is the same as” is used in three ways: (i) ‘wine [khamr] is wine [‘uqar]’ (synonymous names); (ii) ‘the sharp sword [sarim] is the sword [sayf]’ (antonymous names); (iii) ‘snow is white and cold,’ as such white and cold are one (‘it is the same as’ indicates a plurality which is one in some respect).

**Conclusion:** Al-Ghazali concluded that the logical outcome of the above premises is: “it is clear that our saying ‘is the same as’ presupposes multiplicity

in one respect and unity in another;” or “that there is unity in meaning and multiplicity in words alone.”

He gives an illustration further that helps us in understanding the above-mentioned premises; it follows Al-Ghazali’s use of “the name,” “the named” and “the naming”:

The Lord is not being named here in one name, but is named in ninety-nine names.
(1) Each one of the ninety-nine names has a different meaning that signifies its proper conditions.
(2) All the ninety-nine names are qualifying one essence.
(3) The ninety-nine names do not demand many names, but rather, one.

Al-Ghazali asserts that some divine names share the same meaning. For example, unity is derived from two names, namely, ‘the One’ [al-Ahad] and ‘the Unique’ [al-Wahid]. But other divine names do not share the same meaning. ‘The Omniscient’ [al-Alim] and ‘He who is aware of everything’ [al-Khabir] refer to two dissimilar meanings. The former refers to knowing alone, while the latter refers to knowing interior things. For this reason, Al-Ghazali argued that these ninety-nine beautiful names of God, “although interrelated in meaning, are not synonymous.” Now, it is important to note a problem that occurs with understanding Al-Ghazali. If the ninety-nine beautiful names of God are predicated of God as Al-Ghazali argued, the logic of this point is that we are able to know God through His names. But as mentioned earlier in the beginning of this section, Al-Ghazali holds that God is unknowable. How then is it that Al-Ghazali claims that God is unknowable since he also asserted that God is knowable through His names? In other words, it seems that Al-Ghazali’s arguments contradict one another. To understand what Al-Ghazali means, we need to explore his thoughts on knowing God.

It is worth noting that Al-Ghazali affirms that both the premise that one is able to know God (“no one other than God knows God’) and not knowing God (“I know God”) are true. With regard to the former, Al-Ghazali contended that we can only know God in two ways. Nevertheless, one is inadequate and the other one is closed. Al-Ghazali illustrates that, “for He (God) is living but not like living things; powerful but not like powerful persons.” Another explanation of his would be as follows:

*Premise 1:* one says “I know God” is right;
*Premise 2:* one says “only God – great and glorious – knows God” is right;
*Conclusion:* Al-Ghazali affirmed that both *Premises 1* and *2* are correct.

The above premises suggest a conclusion that God is both knowable and unknowable at the same time. Al-Ghazali, however, does not leave this seemingly contradictory conclusion without explanation. Rather he wisely responded with the verse of the Koran, VIII:17 that says, “You did not throw when you threw, but God threw” and argued that some things might seem impossible to man, but for God everything is possible. According to Al-Ghazali, as well as to the people of the Sunna, there are ten fundamental possibilities for reducing the divine names into the essence. In addition, Al-Ghazali points out that the

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297 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 24-25.
298 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 25.
299 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 36-37.
300 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 38-42.
301 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 159-62. This ten possibilities are as follows: The attributes indicate (1) the essence (e.g., ‘Allah’ and ‘the Truth’ [al-Haqq]). (2) the essence with a negation (e.g., ‘the Holy’ [al-Qudus], ‘the Rich’ [al-Ghani], ‘the One’ [al-Wahid]). (3) The essence with something added (‘the Most High’
application of divine names and attributes applied to God are grounded on two books: *The Divine Instruction* [*tawqif*, which refers to the teaching proceeding from both the *Koran* and *Hadith*] and *The Basis of Reason*.  

Al-Ghazali argues that, in his words, “whatever pertains to names is based on authorization; whereas whatever pertains to attributes is not based on authorization; rather, the ones that are authentic are acceptable, but not the false one.”

After showing that the ninety-nine names are proper names to predicate God, Al-Ghazali further expounds how these names and his above arguments resolve the problem of the simple essence and seven attributes.

**Al-Ghazali’s Contention: Unity among Divine Essential Attributes**

It is crucial to see the relationship between divine simplicity and divine names/attributes for understanding Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity. According to Al-Ghazali, knowing who God is implies knowing what God is, and knowing what God is postulates a knowing of what one can appropriately say about God. After looking into Al-Ghazali’s views of divine names in the above section, we are now at the stage of examining his understanding of divine attributes. Al-Ghazali holds that the seven essential divine attributes do not compromise the fundamental belief of the oneness of God (*Tawhid*). Nevertheless, this understanding seems to generate a problem, which is closely related to the history of Islam. As such, what follows will identify the central problem of divine attributes through exploring the course of Islamic history.

According to the Mu’tazilite school and its philosophers, in order to safeguard the doctrine of a simple God, one must deny the attributes of God and hold that there is only a single essence in God. Although they neither deny divine actions, nor a multiplicity of negations or additions [to it], they resolve or reduce all of God’s attributes to His actions, or more precisely, to a single essence. Mu’tazilites asserted that the doctrine of *ta’wil*, or the allegorical interpretation of this term used in the *Koran*, describe all the positive characteristics of God. However, this thesis generates a difficulty when one turns to the *Koran*’s teaching on the eternal attributes inherent in God. Fakhry observed that many Mu’tazilite scholars earnestly sought to rationalize divine attributes and did so by giving up all positive attributes of God in order to safeguard God’s unity. This is a major criticism that Al-Ghazali expressed in *Tahafut*. Al-Ghazali points out that attributes are represented by the Mu’tazillite thinkers as something distinct from the essence of the entity they qualify and adventitious to it. According to the Mu’tazilites, the composition of essence and

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[al-Ali]). (4) An attribute with a negation and something added (‘the King’ [al-Malik]. (5) One of the seven attributes, an attribute with negation (this is further explained in 3.4.2). (6), (7), (8) An attribute with something added (something in addition to knowing, like ‘the Wise’ [al-Hakim]; to power, ‘the Dominator’ [al-Qahhar]; to will, ‘the infinitely Good’[al-Rahman] ). (9) An attribute of action (‘the Creator’ [al-Khaliq]). (10) With something added or negated (‘the All-Glorious’ [al-Majid]).

302 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 177.
303 Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 177.
304 See Al-Ghazali, Ninety Nine Names, 163-65; See also Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, 109: Al-Ghazali observes that both the Mu’tazilah and the philosophers assert “[t]hese names have been used by the Sacred Law, and their application is etymologically defensible. Nevertheless, they all mean – as has been shown above – the same thing, viz., the one essence. It is not right to affirm attributes which are additional to the Divine essence, as our knowledge or power is an attribute additional to our essence. For such a thing necessitates plurality…So the Divine attributes, even if coexistent with the Divine essence, will not cease to be an additional to the essence.” and compare to Fakhry, History of Islamic, 43-66.
305 See Majid Fakhry, History of Islamic, 43-66.
306 See Majid Fakhry, History of Islamic, 59.
307 See the discussions of Al-Ghazali on God and His attributes in Al-Ghazali, Tahafut, from Problem III to Problem XI.
attributes is logically impossible for a God who is absolutely simple.\textsuperscript{308} In sum, from the history of Islamic philosophy and *kalam*, we are able to recognize that the central problem of divine attributes lies in whether attributes which are conceived as a real, incorporeal being are distinct from divine essence or, rather, exist in God.\textsuperscript{309}

Unlike the Mu’tazilites, Al-Ghazali in his treatise, *Iqtisad*, affirmed the following. First, the Koran clearly indicates that the seven essential divine attributes of *power*, *knowledge*, *life*, *will*, *seeing*, *hearing* and *speech* subsist eternally in God’s essence. Second, these attributes are different properties. For Al-Ghazali, the consistency of God’s unity is not simply a concern for numerical unity. Rather, the uniqueness and wholeness of God is extended to many of God’s essential attributes.\textsuperscript{310} It would be better for me to summarize the main premises of Al-Ghazali:\textsuperscript{311}

- **Premise 1:** Divine attributes are dependent on their subject, namely, divine essence. But divine essence does not depend on the attributes. For example, God is love, but love is not God. From this premise, Al-Ghazali asserts that the Mu’tazilah often misplaced the order by either claiming that both essence and attributes are independent of each other; or that both essence and attributes are dependent on each other;
- **Premise 2:** Divine attributes are in divine essence. Since an eternal being is uncaused, the attributes and essence of an eternal proceed are both uncaused, as well;
- **Premise 3:** “The First Principle is a possessor of attributes who is eternal and uncaused, and whose essence, attributes, and the subsistence of the attributes in the essence are all uncaused, each existing from eternity to eternity,”;\textsuperscript{312}
- **Conclusion:** “The impossibility of attributes existing, not in bodies (which are other than the attributes), but in themselves, is also an argument to prove that the attributes of living beings – e.g., knowledge, life, power, will, seeing, hearing and speech – exist, not in themselves, but in an essence.”\textsuperscript{313}

Based on the above premises, Al-Ghazali argues strongly against the Philosophers’ concept of God’s simplicity since it eventually leads to the denial of God’s attributes. Unlike Ibn Sina and the Philosophers, Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of the necessary being defends the existence of a being who is without a cause but not without composition. More precisely, the essence is uncaused but compatible with a being that has a multiplicity of essential attributes. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali has provided a convincing argument for divine predicates or attributes in *Iqtisad*:

First, the seven attributes are not God’s essence. Rather “they are distinct and superadded to the essence (dhal)”\textsuperscript{314} Al-Ghazali used the example of “First Attribute (Power)” to explain this. According to this example, the relation between power and its object is the relation between the effect and it’s cause. As such, “the Creator of the world is powerful;” “the world is a masterly work.”\textsuperscript{315} In other words, God’s absolute power is related to every possible thing. According to Al-Ghazali, every contingent thing and every act or movement is divisible into separate parts, and that power creates movement after movement.\textsuperscript{316}

\textsuperscript{308} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 109-124.  
\textsuperscript{309} Fakhry, *History of Islamic*, 32, 47, 57-62.  
\textsuperscript{310} Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 65-75.  
\textsuperscript{312} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 115.  
\textsuperscript{313} Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 124.  
\textsuperscript{314} Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 65.  
\textsuperscript{315} Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 1-2.  
\textsuperscript{316} Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 4.
Second, unlike Mu’tazilah who claimed that knowledgeness [being alim] (and all other attributes reduced to one essence) is a mode (halah) of the essence, but not attributes (since attributes are contingent things) of the divine essence, Al-Ghazali affirms that all the attributes mentioned in the Koran are inherent in God (essence), and eternal, as well. Al-Ghazali uses the illustration of “knowing” and “having knowledge” to explain this. Similar to “knowing” and “having knowledge” which is one and the same thing, Al-Ghazali asserts, “in this essence (dhat) knowledge subsists.” In other words, all attributes subsist in God’s essence and none of them could possibly subsist without His essence.

Third, for Al-Ghazali, divine attributes are not something other than God. Al-Ghazali explains that when we say ‘Allah,’ we refer to the essence ‘dhat’ together with it’s attributes; rather than to the essence alone, as the term ‘Allah’ could not be predicated of an essence that is judged to be free from the divine attributes.

Fourth, Al-Ghazali asserts that God’s names in the Koran were derived from these seven essential attributes. Thus, they are sempiternally (azalan) and eternally predicated of Him (essence). Therefore, Al-Ghazali concluded that, “He is, in eternity, Living, Knowing, Powerful, Willing, Hearing, Seeing, and Speaking.”

By exploring the nature of Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity, and the relationship between divine essence and divine attributes in Section 3.2, and then also further exploring the main problem of Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity and his solution for the problem in Section 3.3, the manner in which Al-Ghazali secured divine simplicity through the names of God and his seven essential attributes has been shown.

3.3.4 Divine Simplicity in relation to the Uncreated Koran

In Islamic tradition, among the seven essential divine attributes in the Koran, the speech of God has been subject to great controversy in philosophical-theological circles. Thus, there is a need to explore how Al-Ghazali argues that God’s speech (or the Koran) is co-eternal to God yet does not compromise the unity of God. If the Koran is co-eternal to God, does this mean that the Koran is uncreated? We begin with looking into the nature of the Koran. As Fakhry observed, the Mu’tazilah school’s denial of eternal attributes is also a denial of the eternity of God’s speech. It follows that God’s speech is a created accident. This concept of God’s speech is shown in the Preserved Tablet (al-Lauh al-Mahfuz or original codes in heaven). On the other hand, the traditionalist’s view (Asharite school) of the Koran holds that the Koran is uncreated. This view is seen in Ibn Abbas’ thought (A.D. 618-687) that the eternal attribute is real, including the eternal attribute of ‘Word’ in the sense of an eternal pre-existent Koran.

According to this view, the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘speech’ are predicated of God and directed to the Koran – the uncreated divine attributes entail the uncreated Koran.

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317 Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 80-97.
318 Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 65-75.
319 Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates, 74.
321 Fakhry, History of Islamic, 63; and Andrew Rippin ed, The Blackwell Companion to the Quran (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 425; and Henry Corbin, History of Islamic, 108-09, 116. According to Al-Asharite, Koran is eternal in the sense that divine attribute of Kalam is subsisting eternally in God, as such, is exempted from all verbal and phonetic articulation. Nevertheless, the Koran is also composed of words as it is written. Thus, from this aspect, it is created and a temporal fact. Everything is created through the word “be” uttered by God. Now, if word is also created, it follows that there will be an endless chain of creations, which is an absurdity.
Following the As’harite tradition, Al-Ghazali in *Iqtisad* holds to the uncreated Koran through the following arguments.\(^{323}\) Firstly, Al-Ghazali distinguishes two aspects of speech through (i) sound and letters (*huruf*); and (ii) inner speech (*hadithu-n-nafs*). Al-Ghazali points out that God’s speech belongs to inner speech.\(^{324}\) Secondly, God’s speech is an eternal attribute subsisting in God’s essence, and humans (Moses/the Messenger) heard it neither by letter nor by sound, but rather, by inner speech.\(^{325}\) Thirdly, “God’s speech is written in the books (*masahif*), preserved in the hearts, and read by tongues. Paper, ink, writing, consonants, and vowels are all contingent things because they are bodies and accidents in bodies and all that are contingent.”\(^{326}\) Al-Ghazali argues that the Koran existed before its revelation, or more precisely: it is even before the creation of the world. Al-Ghazali asserts that God’s speech is “being,” it is not created. Thus, this proves that the *Koran*, namely, God’s speech, is uncreated. It seems to me that Al-Ghazali’s argument acts against rationality, which is different from rationalism, since his theological conclusion is derived on the basis of the *Koran*, not just with reasoning. Based on the above principle, Al-Ghazali affirms that the Koran is including both God’s uncreated speech and created human writing.

### 3.4 CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

In this chapter, we conclude that from Islamic historical, philosophical, and theological perspectives, Al-Ghazali’s doctrine of divine simplicity represents the Ash’arite school over the Mu’tazilite’s version of divine simplicity or the view that created reality marks the first step toward the philosophization of the Muslim mind. Perhaps, their major difference is not their understanding of divine essence (both Al-Ghazali and Islamic Neo-Platonists affirm their God is utterly simple), rather it is the distinct ways in which each solves the problem of the attribution of predicates to divine simplicity. For those Mu’tazilites and Islamic Neo-Platonists who want to safeguard the divine unity (*Tawhid*), believe that it is necessary to resolve all the essential divine attributes to a single essence. On the other hand, to Al-Ghazali, in order to safeguard the genuine divine unity (*Tawhid*) it is not necessary to reduce all the seven essential attributes to a simple essence. In fact, Al-Ghazali repeatedly shows that it is necessary to make a fundamental distinction between our human attributes and the divine attributes: the plurality of divine attributes does not make addition to a single divine essence as human attributes make addition to human being. In short, I would conclude, to Al-Ghazali, “the plurality of seven essential divine attributes” does not make a “singularity of divine essence” plural.

However, the present study is mainly a comparative study between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas on divine simplicity, thus we will only concentrate on the discussion of Al-Ghazali’s version of Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity: if God is utterly unique and wholly one, the fact of God’s being is not identical to His essence, and the real existence of a plurality of divine attributes does not compromise His essential simplicity. Perhaps Al-Ghazali’s causality is the central solution to explain how these many divine names resolve to the simplicity of essence with seven essential attributes. In addition, among the issues and difficulties highlighted in the above Section 3.3, I have tested Al-Ghazali’s view of divine simplicity on its systematic relevance to these theological issues. In addressing them I have shown that Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity can stand up to these criticisms, and is an orthodox version of divine simplicity in Sunni Islam. In concluding, the overview of Al-Ghazali’s view of divine simplicity; let me finally sum up its

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\(^{323}\) *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, 49.

\(^{324}\) *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, 49.

\(^{325}\) *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, 55.

\(^{326}\) *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, 55.
main characteristics in terms of an agenda for further comparative study with Aquinas’ divine simplicity in the final chapter.

The above discussions in this chapter show that the following are the most obvious characteristics of Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity that deserve to compare with Aquinas’ divine simplicity in the final chapter:

First, in section 3.2, we have answered the question: “what is God’s being?” by identifying that the nature of divine simplicity in Al-Ghazali’s thought is grounded in a twofold idea, namely, the uniqueness and wholeness of God. We have also shown how Al-Ghazali’s view of causality has solved the problem of attributions in his divine simplicity, in which the relationship between divine essence with His attributes are “not identical, but not different”.

Second, in section 3.3.2, we have discussed the relationship between God’s simplicity and His multiplicity of creations in Al-Ghazali. According to Al-Ghazali, the twofold idea – the uniqueness and wholeness – of God is known and unknown by His creatures. The knowable aspect of God has been revealed in the Koran through His knowable attributes, and the unknowable aspect of God is His incomprehensible essence, which is beyond our human understanding.

Third, in section 3.3.3, we encountered still another set of attribute problems (the unity of the divine names and divine attributes). In the framework of Al-Ghazali’s divine simplicity, the development of the distinctions between divine names/attributes and human names/attributes can be seen as an attempt to solve these attribute problems.

Fourth, in section 3.3.4, we met another cluster of problems that needed be sorted out. The discussion of the origin of God’s speech/word is mainly central in the issue of whether the word of God in the Koran is created or uncreated. To Al-Ghazali, the word of God is one of the seven essential attributes, it is “being” (co-eternal with God), and is in the sense of an eternal pre-existent Koran.

After all, this chapter creates and prepares for comparative studies of Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views of divine simplicity. After commenting on the general Sunni tradition's approach to the doctrine of divine simplicity in light of their giant formulation of divine simplicity – Al-Ghazali – as exhibited in this chapter, I shall turn to an examination of Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity, the significant thinker of the medieval Christian scholars in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4: THOMAS AQUINAS ON DIVINE SIMPLICITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Divine Simplicity and the Scope of Its Study

In order to trace where our discussion so far has brought us, let us revert to our brief survey and discussion of the main problem in Christian divine simplicity, as given at the end of chapters 1 and 2. In that discussion, we identified three main questions for the formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Christian tradition. First, the norm of theological reflection on divine simplicity should have harmony between faith and reason within the Christian tradition (e.g., the Bible, Christian Creeds). Historically, we also examined that the history of the doctrine of divine simplicity had some criteria that become the biblical inheritance for the formulation and evaluation of divine simplicity in Christianity: (i) The only One God; (ii) The Triune God; (iii) the attributes of God. Secondly, in chapter 2 we also identified some logical dilemmas within the Christian doctrine of divine simplicity, and were treated to various versions of divine simplicity by the Christian thinkers, particularly their various positions on the philosophy for understanding Christian divine simplicity. We also encountered that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is not only the significant thinker who dealt with the classical Christian doctrine of divine simplicity in the medieval age, but also provided an account of divine simplicity more systematic and explicit than any other Christian thinker in his monumental Summa Theologiae, and also in his other major works. Indeed, in his S.T. Q3, 1-8, Aquinas is the first Christian thinker who treats the

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327 See the discussion of the origin and development of divine simplicity before Aquinas in Section 2.4.
328 See Section 2.4; see also God’s simplicity defined in the a number of Bible verses (Deut. 6:4; Ex. 20:1-3; Isa. 43:10; Jn. 17:3; Mk. 12:29; 1Cor. 8:6; 1Thess. 1:9; 1Tim.1:17) which are at the basis of all Christian theologians argument for this simplicity of God.
329 See Section 2.4; see also God’s simplicity in relation to the Triune God (three Personae “the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit” is identified as God of one divine nature) in a number of Bible verses (Isa. 63:9-14; Matt. 28:19; Mk. 2:7, 10; Luke 10:17; Jn. 1:12; Acts 2:21; Rom. 15:6, 16; 2 Co. 1:3; Gal. 1:1; Heb. 1:3) which are at the basis of all Christian theologian [do you mean theological or theologians]? You should correct this in other places, as well as the odd phrasing Bible Scripture verses] arguments for the triune God.
330 See Section 2.4; see also God’s simplicity in relation to His attributes defined in Bible the following several Scripture verses (God’s goodness [the Only Good God] in Isa.55:1, Mk.10:18; 1Jn. 4:16; ‘God’s knowledge’ [the Only Wise God] 1Sam.2:3 and Isa. 40:28; ‘God’s immutability’Mal.3:6; God’s sovereignty in Ex. 33:19 and Rom. 9-11, etc.,) which are at the basis of all Christian theologians argument for this [this attribute or these attributes] “attributes of God.”
331 See the discussion on the problem and reasons for discussing Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity in Section 1.1; see also the discussion on the continuity and discontinuity of Christian divine simplicity before Aquinas in Section 2.4. In this chapter, I will mainly focus on the major work of Aquinas: Summa Theologiae (1265-72), vol 1, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, reprint. (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, 1981), but will make a reasonable choice for his other major works as well, see note 6. Since I shall want to refer to Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae rather frequently in what follows, in my quotations/references of Summa Theologiae in the remainder of this chapter, parentheses in the text (e.g. S.T.Q3,1) will be used, unless otherwise noted.
doctrine of divine simplicity before all the divine attributes, since Aquinas believes that
divine simplicity should qualify additional attributes of a simple God.333

Now we shift our attention to the four primary specific modes of the doctrine of
divine simplicity in Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae. It was along Christian traditional lines that
Aquinas profiled the doctrine of divine simplicity, in which he speaks of God’s simplicity in
relation to the problem of divine simplicity on the basis of biblical inheritance:334 These four
aspects of that problem have been treated by Aquinas, and they can be summarised as follows
(I will take up the discussion of Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity in a more detail at
Section 4.2.3):

(1) After Aquinas’ traditional proof of God’s existence in S.T. Q2, another crucial
question is posed to Aquinas in S.T.Q3: “what is God’s being?” or “What does
Aquinas mean by God?” or more precisely, “how God is not?” For Aquinas, God is
utterly simple if and only if God’s essence is without any “compositions,” in negative
terms: not a body (S.T.Q3, 1), not a composition of matter and form (S.T.Q3, 2), not
other than His essence or nature (S.T.Q3, 3), not other than His being (esse) and
existence (S.T.Q3, 4), not a genus (S.T.Q3, 5), not an accidental (S.T.Q3, 6). BUT
entirely simple (S.T.Q3, 7-8).

(2) If Aquinas claims that God is utterly simple without any compositions able to be
predicated in God as shown above, how should Aquinas predicate all other divine
attributes which are predicated of God in Biblical Scripture: God is perfect, good,
infinite, powerful, present, immutable, eternal, and united, yet He is a simple God?
(S.T.Q4-Q11) For Aquinas, if God is the only true One if and only if an absolutely
simply perfection which is the status of all divine attributes mentioned within His
unity; and isn’t it true that only if this “divine attributes” distinctively and yet
necessarily can be deduced from His simple being, then God is simplicity itself
(S.T.Q11, 1-4)?

(3) If God is one, then how can the multiplicity of divine names in Biblical Scripture be
applied to God and be able to predicate His unity? For Aquinas, “the multiplicity of
divine names” is necessary because of His simplicity. Aquinas contends that divine
names that are named by God Himself in Biblical Scripture (e.g. “HE WHO IS”335)
are most properly applied to God (S.T.Q13, 1-12, especially S.T.Q13, 11).

(4) If God is utterly simple, then how could Aquinas’ understand the claim that the Triune
God – three Personae (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) – is identified as God of
one divine nature? We have to examine how Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity is
possible or compatible to another most central doctrine, namely, the doctrine of
Trinity, in Christianity. I would seek to know in this section of “why the three divine
personae does not itself imply there are three gods, rather a simple God to Aquinas.”

Although the doctrine of divine simplicity was once associated with Christian
theology, an essential part, and a norm of Christian theological-philosophical reflection after

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333 See Jay Wesley Richards, “The Difficult Doctrine of Divine Simplicity” in The Untamed God: A
Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Immutability and Simplicity (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003),
213-240.

334 See also Section 4.2.1, the summary of chapter 2.

335 See Exod. 3:13-14.
Aquinas, it is now widely rejected as incoherent and inconsistent with Biblical Scripture.\textsuperscript{336} Among the many contemporary thinkers who discuss the credibility of the Christian doctrine of divine simplicity and particularly Aquinas’ version of it, Alvin Plantinga plays a very significant role. In his \textit{Does God have a Nature?}\textsuperscript{337} Plantinga identifies the difficulties of Aquinas’ divine simplicity, and he triggered extensive discussions about the difficulties of the doctrine of divine simplicity, particularly Aquinas’. Plantinga boldly indicated that if God is identical with His essence, then God is identical with a property.\textsuperscript{338} Nevertheless, this could not be the case as God being a person is not just a property. Plantinga questioned that if there are no accidental properties in God, it will be difficult to characterize God as a person.\textsuperscript{339} In this, Plantinga rejected Aquinas’ divine simplicity and concluded that it was incompatible with the Christian understanding of God as a person.\textsuperscript{340} Following Plantinga, there are a number of scholars who agree with him, such as William Mann (1982, 87) and Thomas V. Morris (1985, 1988).\textsuperscript{341} Besides, Christopher Hughes in his \textit{On A Complex Theory of A Simple God} (1989)\textsuperscript{342} attempted to argue that the philosophical and theological account of Aquinas’ divine simplicity is unworkable by presenting it as “two incompossible Gods.” Hughes argues that there are “two incompossible Gods” according to Aquinas’ divine simplicity, namely a simple God of philosophers, and the Triune and incarnate God of faith.\textsuperscript{343} On the other hand, there are scholars who defend Aquinas’ understanding of simplicity. Rollend Edward Houser (1981) appears to have done a profound work and made a fair judgement of Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{344} Houser points out that both the Scholastic and Aristotelian predecessors of Aquinas, particularly Three philosophers: Aristotle, Avicenna and Averroes, had shaped his understanding of transcendental unity, and Houser observed that Aquinas developed his own version of divine simplicity in continuity and discontinuity with both the Scholastic and Aristotelian predecessors.\textsuperscript{345} In addition, F. G. Immink (1987), Lawrence Dewan (1989), John Lamont (1997), and Jeffrey E. Brower (2008) have also attempted to defend the coherence and validity of this doctrine of divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{346} Also, Mann in his \textit{Divine Simplicity} revisited the medieval understanding of God’s attributes, particularly Aquinas on divine simplicity, and asserted that the concept of God’s attributes and essences might be distinct from the medieval scholars’ and contemporary scholars’ ideas. Therefore, Mann has argued that one should be aware of such differences in

\textsuperscript{337} Alvin Plantinga, \textit{Does God have a Nature?} (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 26-61.
\textsuperscript{338} Plantinga, \textit{Does God have a Nature?} 47.
\textsuperscript{339} See Plantinga, \textit{Does God have a Nature?} 37-47.
\textsuperscript{340} Plantinga, \textit{Does God have a Nature?} 46-47, 57-58.
\textsuperscript{343} Hughes, \textit{On a Complex.} 269-271.
\textsuperscript{345} Houser, “Thomas Aquinas on Transcendental Unity, 1-17, 18-28, 242-250.
discussing Aquinas on divine simplicity. Indeed, Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Divine Simplicity* (1991) has carefully reviewed the above discussions, and reintroduced an alternative solution to understanding Aquinas on divine simplicity by proposing the term “what-it-is-as such” as a certain nature of God. Wolterstorff argues that if we analyse Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity within the style of constituent ontology (medieval ontology), not within the style of contemporary ontology, then Aquinas on divine simplicity is not at all baffling.

The above contemporary authors on Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity more or less have good reasons to reject or defend this doctrine. But in any case, most of them fall short of the mark – a norm of theological reflection on divine simplicity along with Christian tradition as shown above. In this chapter, it is not my purpose here to discuss these contemporary views, rather I will reflect on how Aquinas’ treatises would treat the above four main difficulties along this norm of Christian theological line, and examine whether his formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity within the framework of his *Summa Theologiae* should drive today’s Christian to reconceived or even to abandon this doctrine. In doing so I hope to accomplish at least two things, as mentioned in section 1.8: (1) shed light on four comparative characteristics of Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity for the purpose of comparative study in chapter 5; and (2) give us an adequate idea of access for understanding Aquinas’ divine simplicity in contemporary discussion. These aims will become clear when I discuss the doctrine of divine simplicity in Aquinas below. Thus, it is not the concern of this chapter neither to extend Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity nor to show the influences of Greek and Islamic philosophers’ sources in his doctrine of divine simplicity (although I am fully aware of these influences in Aquinas’ thoughts, see Section 2.1 and 2.4).

### 4.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

In this chapter, my discussion will proceed as follows. I begin in Section 4.2.1, first with a summary of chapter 2: the brief survey of the doctrine of divine simplicity before Aquinas, making clear why the norm of theological reflection has provided a ground to adequately present and analyse the idea of divine simplicity in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. Following what has been discussed: Section 4.2.1 explores what the relationship between faith and reason is in Aquinas’ thought, followed by what Aquinas’ key terms meant when he employed them for formulating his understanding of divine simplicity. I then turn, in Section 4.2.2, to the question whether Aquinas’ treatment of divine simplicity is coherent in itself and consistent with the biblical view of divine simplicity. Here I first concentrate on the main arguments for divine simplicity in Aquinas, especially his view on the nature of simplicity. I then attempt to show that Aquinas was able to solve the problem of divine simplicity by characterizing the concept of God as a unique triune one, through which he safeguarded God’s attributes without sacrificing God’s simplicity. This will be done in Section 4.2.3. Finally, in Section 4.3, I examine Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity through the lens of related theological issues that he had discussed, such as the essence and existence of God, the

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349 Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity.” 541-551: Wolterstorff indicates that there are two different roots of understanding Aquinas on divine simplicity: (1) With the medieval *style of constituent ontology* in mind, the medieval scholars will develop the theory of predication without compromising God’s simplicity. On the other hand, (2) by adopting the contemporary *style of relation ontology*, contemporary scholars come to another understanding of identity and therefore have difficulty with simplicity and will also problematize Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity.
350 Due to limitation of space, I have not been able to include them in this study.
unknown God and the world, divine names and attributes, and the Triune God and incarnated Christ. This examination aims to find out whether Aquinas has successfully solved the problem of divine simplicity, as well as to discover Aquinas’ grounds for safeguarding a unique Triune God.

4.2 THE NATURE OF SIMPLICITY: GOD AND HIS NATURE

4.2.1 Preliminary Remarks

In the Christian tradition, the doctrine of divine simplicity is very difficult to understand, to analyse, and to explain, partly due to the different terms used in the discussion of this topic. Because of this, it would be wise first to indicate and explain some of the important terms used by Aquinas in his description of the simplicity of God. Moreover, Muller, Immink, Woltersorff and Houser have pointed out that in order for contemporary scholars to appropriately examine and understand Aquinas’ idea of divine simplicity, it is necessary and well-deserved to identify, to indicate the key terms and to elaborate issues that were used in the medieval context of interpretation. Thus, in this section, I will revisit the historical location of this doctrine, then explain the main issue (e.g., Faith and Reason), and identify some key terms. The major key terms that had greatly impacted and shaped Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity, such as “form and matter,” “essence and existence,” “a se,” etc. are brought up in the following sections.

We have seen in chapter 2 about the origin and development of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Christian tradition. In fact, it is fundamental for the Christian Church before Aquinas to proclamation of God’s singularity. Thus, it is not surprising that similar passages pervade Aquinas’ formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity in his *Summa*:

“… [I]n a simple being, being and that which is the same. For, if one is not the other, the simplicity is then removed. But, as we have shown, God is absolutely simple. Therefore, for God to be good is identical with God. He is, therefore, His goodness” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I,38).

“His simplicity, whereby we deny composition in Him; and because whatever is simple in material things is imperfect and a part of something else, we shall discuss (2) His perfection; (3) His infinity; (4) His immutability; (5) His unity (or oneness)” (S.T. Q3, Intro.).

“… God is the most truly simple thing there is” (S.T. Q3,7 ).

From the above sketch of the origin and the development of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Christian tradition, it is inevitable that the idea of “God is utterly simple” is implanted in Christian widely since the 1st century (this was covered in Chapter 2). Like Islamic tradition, the predicates that rightly attribute simplicity to God became one of the issues that required explanations by the early Church fathers, as well as medieval theologians (see Section 2.4). However, unlike Islamic tradition, there is another cluster of problems that arose mainly within Christian monotheistic tradition, namely, the doctrine of the triune God – “three persons of one divine nature.” As a matter of fact, such a notion of “God is one and triune” has not only become an orthodoxy confession, but has also become the norm of theological reflections in Christianity widely. I have also presented an account of the

351 See the discussions of why contemporary thinkers find the doctrine of divine simplicity so difficult in Muller, *Post-Reformation*, vol 3, 46-58; Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, especially13-14, 123-145; Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity: 541-551; and Houser, “Thomas Aquinas,” Introduction, vi-x.

352 We have observed from Section 2.4 that with respect to the concept of God, believing in the Triune One is a mark of the orthodox Christian view.
doctrine of divine simplicity, which played an important role in shaping the doctrine of God of the medieval Christian scholars, particularly Aquinas.  

I have chosen Aquinas from all the medieval scholastic thinkers due to the significant influence of his doctrine of divine simplicity (which is related to divine essence, attributes and trinity) in the development of the doctrine of divine simplicity in the Western Christian tradition. We can also observe from the vantage point of Christian dogmatic history that Aquinas' DDS often exemplifies only one position in the major medieval debate. For this reason, it is important to note that understanding Aquinas' view of divine simplicity would enable us to understand Aquinas' God as well as how God was understood in the Middle Ages. However, it is also worth noting that among the scholastic theologians during Aquinas' time, Alexander of Hales (1183-1245), Albert the Great (1200?-1280) and Bonaventure (1221-1274) had discussed the attributes of God and formulated their diverse versions of this doctrine through a logical approach. In other words, Aquinas' view of divine simplicity (1225-1274) is not the only version coming from medieval Christianity. Furthermore, Aquinas' “synthesis” of theology and philosophy was not universally accepted during his time and in the later middle ages. Nevertheless, Aquinas' model was endorsed in the Roman Catholic's teaching in 1567, 1879, and 1917. Besides, Aquinas’ DDS had a certain impact on the Reformers’ teaching and their Protestant scholastic successors as well. Although different formulations of the doctrine of divine simplicity are found

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353 See Section 2.4. We have already seen that the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity has its roots in antiquity, and perhaps one may able to trace it ultimately to Parmenides, but the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity received its most articulated development and careful defence at the hands of the medieval scholastic theologians.  


355 See Muller, Post-Reformation, vol 3, 58-61. Muller observed that for “Alexander of Hales, the key to understanding the doctrine of the divine essence and attributes was certainly the immensity or immeasurability” (58).  

356 See Muller, Post-Reformation, vol 3, p. 61; Heiko A. Oberman, “Fourteenth-Century Religious Thought: A Premature Profile,” in The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 1-17, especially in 4-5. Muller and Oberman observed that unlike the Franciscan or the Augustinian orders, Thomas Aquinas’ model of the relationship of philosophy and theology was disputed by a large number of later medieval thinkers, including Johannes Duns Scotus, William Durandus, Aureole, William of Ockham, Robert Holcot, and Gabriel Biel. See also Josef Lortz, The Reformation in Germany, 2 vols., trans. Ronald Walls (London and New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), vol. I. 67-77, 193-210. It has been also noted by Josef Lortz as a sign of decadence and disintegration. Lortz further observed that it was this decadence that prepared the way for the Reformation, inasmuch as the chief characteristics of the Reformation were the mistaken rejection of the entire tradition of scholastic theology based on an equation of this problematic later medieval theology and philosophy with Catholic faith. In sum, this seems to me an unfortunately act of “throwing out the baby with the bath water.”  

357 See Saint Thomas Aquinas, The Person and His Work, vol 1, trans. Robert Royal (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 324-25. Aquinas was proclaimed as Doctor of the Church on 15 April 1567 by Saint Pius V, a Dominican Pope. On 4 August 1879, Aquinas was restored as a model of Christian Philosophers and the Angelic Doctor by Pope Leo XIII at Rome. This is seen in the encyclical letter, “On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy According to the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor.” Furthermore, Aquinas has been proclaimed as a standard definition form of principles or guide to discuss theological issues by the authority of Pope Benedict XV, 1917 in “The New Codex of Canon Law.”  

358 See Alvin Vos, Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 161-174. Alvin urges that the Protestants scholars should clear the way of their misperceptions of Aquinas’ view of faith, and look for a new appreciation of Aquinas’ thought; see also Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot, “Contemporary Philosophical Theology” in Understanding the Attributes of God. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot Eds. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999) 9-32, especially in 24-25. Gijsbert van der Brink and Marcel Sarot observed that theological continuity with the church fathers, the early and medieval Christian theologians and the Reformers, is possible because contemporary Christian scholars participate with them in one common
throughout the Christian tradition (see Section 2.4), the fundamental doctrinal points are clear, and received their fullest treatment in Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity:

First, God is an essential or substantial simplicity;
Second, God is triune one;
Third, the differences “are not in, but between” God’s attributes and divine persons.

It appears that the most popular question of the doctrine of divine simplicity during the medieval period was not about the existence of God. The central problem, instead, was whether it makes sense to hold that a Triune One having divine attributes is a simple God. According to logical positivism, the phrase “there is a Triune One” is literally ambiguous. The difficulty or question that naturally arises is: how could three persons (personae) be said to have a singular essence without compromising the doctrine of divine simplicity? In other words, how could Christians profess that God exists as three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – yet these three persons are not three Gods, but one God?

Furthermore, if the Triune One is a simple God, how could all His attributes be identical with His essence? For example, how could Christians hold that “God is love” without implying that “God has love” which is distinct from God’s essence? Questions such as this and many other questions related to the doctrine of divine simplicity were raised and discussed by the medieval scholars. As I have already presented in Section 2.4 a brief survey and introduction of the complex problem of the traditional Christian understanding of divine simplicity, it would serve no purpose in this chapter to go into them again.

Following his predecessors, Aquinas holds that God is completely free from any sort of component complexity, that is, the doctrine of divine simplicity, which teaches that God is a unique simple being. Though we have seen that some early Church fathers and medieval scholastic theologians were greatly influenced by philosophers in their formulation of divine simplicity, yet like Islamic tradition, what must be noted here is that the proclamation of God’s simplicity is not in Christian tradition merely an outcome of a metaphysical analysis, but relates to the confession of a personal God within the framework of the history of redemption.

In S.T. Third Question, Aquinas contends that “God is truly and absolutely simple” in the sense of not being composite. For Aquinas, God does not possess any nature, but is identical to His nature. Aquinas explains that God is love, but this does not mean that God has love, and so each attribute of God’s nature is identical with each of the other ones. This understanding of Aquinas and his doctrine of divine simplicity has become difficult to understand for many contemporary thinkers and a series of questions have been raised by project, that of faith seeking understanding. For this reason, in my understanding, Aquinas’ defence of DDS at his time is only part of the theological discourse on DDS in line with the theological tradition. This implies that contemporary Christian scholars do not necessarily need to accept all versions of the traditional DDS, and yet they are able to safeguard the necessary continuity with Christian tradition.

Tertullian first used the terminology of personae in exposing the term Trinitas (c 160-220) to refute the Sabellian heresy. According to Muller in Dictionary of Latin and Greek theological terms: drawn principally from Protestant scholastic theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1985), “Tertullian found the terms persona and substantia ideal for identifying an objective threeness and an objective oneness, respectively, in God. In addition, the definition of three personae sharing one substantia made sense using legal analogies.”

I will take up the discussion of Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity in relation to Trinity in Section 4.3.5.

We have observed from Section 2.4 that Augustine, Dionysius The Areopagite, Anselm, Peter Lombard, Albert the Great are Aquinas’ theological predecessors; on the other hand, we also observed from Section 2.2 that Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Avicenna are Aquinas’ philosophical predecessors.

This is my conclusion in Chapter 2.

See Section 2.4.
them. Aquinas uses philosophical arguments and refers to the Bible. This brings us now first to his view on the relation between faith and reason.

A. Faith and Reason in Aquinas’ Formulation of Divine Simplicity

These two bookends frame Aquinas’ view on the doctrine of divine simplicity: faith and reason. In light of the medieval historical survey, the classical Christian understanding of divine simplicity belongs to the scholastic doctrine of God that covers divine essence, attributes, and Trinity. As Muller described, the divine simplicity is “among the normative assumptions of doctrinal theology from the time of the church fathers to the age of great medieval scholastic system.”

This can be found in Peter Lombard’s *The Sentences*, which was the theological commentary – for example, it became a definitive form or standard format for theological discussion for the thirteenth, fourteenth, as well as the fifteenth centuries. Indeed, Aquinas had also written a commentary on *The Sentences*, particularly his earliest treatment of the divine essence: *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum, Book I, Distinction 8*. As such, Christian thinkers, including Augustine, Anselm, Peter Lombard, and Aquinas, attempted to develop a more coherent understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity by describing, explaining and formulating it through the lens of theology (faith) and philosophy (reason). Such an understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity is derived and rooted from the Bible, Christian tradition, and the compatibility of philosophical-theological studies.

With this background, Aquinas imported the uses of language from his predecessors as well as contemporaries who were theologians, such as Peter Lombard and Albert the Great, and philosophers, mainly from neo-platonic philosophers, such as Avicenna, to formulate his own version of divine simplicity. The selected works of Aquinas used in this study show that he followed these sources in ways that were continuous and discontinuous. For example, Aquinas attempted to speak about God’s simplicity in *ST.Q3* by using two principles, the principle of Scripture/theology and the principle of philosophy, to resolve the problem of divine simplicity. Throughout his arguments in *ST.Q3*, many traces of both principles were found intertwining within his arguments in various ways. It might give the impression that Aquinas’ speaking about God’s simplicity is subordinated to the subject of first philosophy.

In fact, Aquinas adopted only the redefinition of philosophical metaphysics, such as his “being” is not merely Aristotle’s *being*; and his “essence” (or *esse*) is not *potentiality of essence*, but “[God’s] essence is itself his being.”

On the other hand, Aquinas inherited the ongoing discussion with the norm of theological reflection in formulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity. For example, he adopted Augustine’s *De

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365 See Muller, *Post-Reformation*, vol 3, 46.
366 See (note 6).
367 See Chapter 2, and see also Muller, *Post-Reformation*, vol 3, 33-61, especially 38-44, 49-58; Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), 1-41. Gilson shows that the notion of Christian philosophy requires an intrinsic relationship between Christian revelation and the resulting philosophical knowledge. It is when the Christian philosopher looks upon what he holds by faith that he becomes a Christian philosopher: “This effort of truth believed to transform itself into truth known, is truly the life of Christian wisdom, and the body of rational truths resulting from the effort is Christian philosophy itself. Thus, the content of Christian philosophy is that body of rational truths discovered, explored or simply safeguarded; thanks to the help reason receives from revelation.” (34-35)
368 Aquinas has using many philosophical metaphysics to speak about God in his major works, such as the *First Cause, First Mover* [the Unmoved Mover], *First Principle, First Being* [the most noble of beings], etc.,
Trinitae and Dionysius’ *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* to resolve the difficulty of the relationship between many attributes and simple essence in the biblical scripture.

In short, much like Al-Ghazali’s formulation of divine simplicity, Aquinas used philosophical resources (mainly Aristotelian philosophy) within his faith (the norm of theological reflection) to rationalize the understanding of the simplicity and unity of God. In other words, for Aquinas, the relationship between faith and reason intertwined without contradiction in such a formulation as the doctrine of divine simplicity. Thus, it does not necessarily follow that Aquinas by his use of faith and of reason he ends up with two Gods, as Hughes says who argues, as we already have seen, that in Aquinas’ two incompossible Gods “meet”, a philosophers’ God and a Christians’ God.

### B. Simplicitas and Unitas

Let us now turn to speak about God’s simplicity and unity in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. Following Augustine’s doctrine of divine simplicity, Aquinas in *ST.I.Q3* echoed “God is truly and absolutely simple.” In order to understand Aquinas’ God, it is necessary to comprehend an indivisible divine unity (*De unitate Dei*) in God’s simplicity along with His attributes and His three *persona*. In this section, I will demonstrate that Aquinas’ divine simplicity rules out any “compositions” but does not exclude distinction among “divine attributes” and the “three divine *persona*.”

In *S.T.Q3*, Aquinas preserved his version of divine simplicity by denying the following types of composition in God:

1. If God is utterly simple, there is no composition of parts in God, such as body or corporeal substance, form and matter, components, etc,
2. There is no potential dissolubility, *genus* and *accidents* in God, since God’s essence is complete actuality and His essence is the same as His existence, “He is through Himself the necessary being;”
3. There is no plurality in God, for plurality are parts of composite and imperfect;
4. There is no diversification in God; for ‘many movers’ is not a perfect mover;
5. There is no other cause in God, for God is first efficient cause;
6. There is no finite in God in the ways that created beings are physically, intellectually, and emotionally limited.

By denying the ideas of composition in God, Aquinas asserted that God is completely simple and one (see *S.T.Q3*, 7-8). For Aquinas, God’s being is utterly simple not in the sense of the philosophical notion of being, but is utterly simple. This brings us to the notion of unity in God.

In *S.T.Q2*, 1 and *S.T.Q11,1-4*, Aquinas not only affirmed the simplicity of God, he also asserted that there is divine unity. The unity of God is such that God’s essence is the same as God’s existence. In Aquinas’ words, “in itself the proposition ‘God exists’ is necessarily true, for in it [this proposition] subject and predicate are the same.” He further

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370 Compare to Gilson, *The Spirit of Philosophy*, 1-41: Gilson concludes his idea of relationship between philosophy and theology in the following way, “Thus I call Christian, every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason.” (37)


373 This list is summarized mainly from Aquinas, *ST I. Q3.1-8*; see also his *Summa Contra Gentiles, I.18, 21-22, 38, 42, 43, 54,*


375 Aquinas, *ST I. Q2.1.*
contended for the undivided relationship between divine simplicity and unity of God in
*ST*.Q28,3 and hold at the same time that “in God there is a real relation [and]...a real
opposition. The very nature of relative opposition includes distinction. Hence, there must be
real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute – namely, essence,
wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity – but according to that which is relative.”

C. Form and Matter:

For Aquinas, there is a distinction between form and matter. He explains in *ST*.Q3.2
that the question of “whether God is composed of matter and form” arises overtly from the
philosophical perspective. Thus, he begins his argument by coming straight to the point by
asking whether “it is impossible that matter should exist in God.” Aquinas explains that,
first, matter is potentiality, and potentiality derived from actuality. But God is the First
Being, thus, He is pure actuality and therefore without any potentiality. Second, composition
of matter owes its perfection to form, but God is the First God and the Best, God is not
matter. Third, because God is the first agent and the first efficient cause, and form is the
manner of the first agent, then God must be primarily and essentially form. Therefore,
Aquinas contends that there is no form of God apart from God, and no divine properties or
matters are distinct from His essence. God is identical to His essence, and God is identical to
His attributes. God is such an immaterial Form that does not require matter.

D. Esse as Essence and Existence:

Aquinas used the concept of *Esse* (literally, “to be,” or “can be derived” as existence)
in describing and explaining the relationship of the essence of God and His existence. For
Aquinas, the essence or nature of God is identical to His existence, since God is a completely
simple being. Aquinas in *The Sentences* (*I*. Sentence Dist. 8, Q4) pointed out that “the divine
being is determined in itself and separated from all other things by the fact that no addition
can be made to it.” This is an important reference to the being of God, and evidence that
God’s being is identical to His essence. There are neither compositions nor corporeal
things in His unique essence. According to Aquinas, when God is identified with His
being, God is presented as the unqualified and simple being. This understanding, to Aquinas,
does not necessary rule out divine attributes, and he attempted to uphold both a simple
essence of God and His attributes in *ST*.Q3.4 by applying the uses of *esse*. Aquinas
explained that we must learn the uses of *esse* in two ways in order to resolve the logical
problem between God’s essence and His attributes: (1) “it may mean the act of essence;” and
(2) “it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate
to a subject.” Aquinas asserted that the use of esse in the second way is a predicative
meaning of divine attributes to God, since we can only understand the second but not the first
way. We can only appropriately predicate divine attributes to God in the second sense of
*esse*.

E. A se:

In Aquinas’ treatises, the term of *a se* is employed to explain that God exists
entirely independently, without having been caused. According to Aquinas, “God is first

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376 Aquinas, *ST*. Q28,3.
378 Aquinas, *ST*. Q3.4
379 Aquinas, *ST*. Q3.4
380 Aquinas, in his treatises, mainly in *I*. Sentence, *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentile*, here
and there employed *a se* to assert his understanding of God’s simpliciy *a se*. 

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principle.”  

God is unlike any other thing because all things are “posterior to its components, because, in order for a third thing to be composed, something is added to a more simple thing that is prior in itself,” God is the first most pure being. Here, Aquinas asserted that God is not possibly a composite being, but an absolute pure being. He further explained that a composite being is dependent on its components, and such a composite being cannot continue to exist when its components have been removed. As such, God as first being cannot be composite. In other words, Aquinas’ God is related to His existence, which is completely simple, undivided, without plurality and composition.

The above brief summary of the doctrine of divine, the issues of faith and reasons, and the explanation of terms serve as a guidepost for us to appropriately unfold and assess Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity in an adequate way. We now turn to explore and examine the nature of divine simplicity in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*.

4.2.2 Nature of Simplicity: Complete Uniqueness and Threeness

As briefly mentioned above, according to Aquinas, the essence or nature of God is identical to His existence, namely, that of a simple being. Having summarized Aquinas’s doctrine of divine simplicity in a previous section (Section 4.1.1), I am now in the position to explore and analyze it in a more detailed account. I will first revisit the three essential elements in his formulation of divine simplicity and then consider whether Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity is either coherent or incoherent with other Christian doctrines, particularly divine attributes and divine Personae.

This understanding of God’s nature is repeated throughout Aquinas’ works. I shall begin by quoting several passages of Aquinas that play an important role in unfolding the nature of Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity. Aquinas is remarkably careful and consistent in the several passages that discussed DDS, thus it is helpful to examine and assess the parallel passages shown in his treatises on DDS. The texts that we are to examine are presented in a parallel series, arranged in the following chronological order:

A. Doctrine of Divine Simplicity in S.T.Q3, 1-7, Q11, Q13, Q27 (1272-1273)

At this point, we must shift our attention to the three primary specific modes of the doctrine of divine simplicity in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* as I promised in the beginning of the chapter. In the foregoing discussion, we already identified that there are Aquinas has treated three difficulties on the doctrine of divine simplicity (see Section 4.1.1), at this point, which we will analyze one by one:

1. “What is God’s being?” or “What does Aquinas mean by God?” or more precisely, “how God is not?” To answer this kind of question, Aquinas in his S.T.Q3, begins by formulating his doctrine of divine simplicity in this framework: “[B]ecause we can not know what God is, but rather what He is not,…how He is not. Therefore, we must consider (i) How He is not; (ii) How He is known by us; (iii) How He is named.”

Following his teachers, Albert the Great, as well as Peter Lombard, Aquinas begins to discuss how God is not: we cannot know the divine essence directly, but we can know how God is not. Aquinas explicitly states that how God is not by excluding any composition. We

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381 Aquinas, *I Sentences* 8. Q4
382 Aquinas, *I Sentences* 8. Q4
383 Aquinas, *I Sentences* 8. Q4
then come to the classical doctrine of divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{384} “God is truly and absolutely simple” (S.T.Q3, 1-8).\textsuperscript{385}

In order to grasp what really Aquinas intends to say about how God is \textit{not}, it is helpful to understand the framework of his argument. I would say that Aquinas in his S.T. Third Question, arguing that how God is not, in fact has two possible answers in mind:

Possible Answer 1: If God is in some way composite, then He is not simple.
Possible Answer 2: If God is not in any way composite, then He is wholly simple.

Aquinas argues for answer 2: God is not in any way composite, and therefore wholly simple.

Before we analyze Aquinas’ arguments for how God is not, let me first reconstruct the premises of what Aquinas’ thesisthat “God is not in any way composite”. I will list them and explain them.

Premise 1, \textit{God is not a body} (S.T.Q3, 1);
Premise 2, \textit{God is not a composition of matter and form} (S.T.Q3, 2);
Premise 3, \textit{God is not other than His essence or nature} (S.T.Q3, 3);
Premise 4, \textit{God is not other than His being (esse) and existence} (S.T.Q3, 4);
Premise 5, \textit{God is not a genus} (S.T.Q3, 5);
Premise 6, \textit{God is not an accidental} (S.T.Q3, 6);
Premise 7, \textit{God is nowise composite} (S.T.Q3, 7);
Premise 8, \textit{God is not part of any composition of other things} (S.T.Q3, 8);
Conclusion: Aquinas comes to conclude that \textit{God is entirely simple} (S.T.Q3, 7).

First, in premise 1, Aquinas argues that God is not a body. For Aquinas, no body moves without being moved, and this movement in a body always implies acts of an earlier body (the acting body itself changes). However, God is the Unmoved First Mover without any potentiality. Hence God is not a body. Aquinas also argues that because a body is extended and therefore infinitely divisible, it entails potentiality. Because God is no potentiality, God is not a body either. In addition, a body consists of other realities, such as life, which do add something to a body. But God is the noblest thing and does not need anything to be added. Thus, Aquinas concludes that God is not a body (S.T.Q3, 1).

Second, Aquinas in premise 2 continues to assert that God is not a composition of matter and form. Aquinas argues in this way: (i) since matter implies potentiality; and God cannot be any such potency, therefore God is not material; (ii) since the composition of matter and form implies that the matter is a substrate participating in form, but God is the first form, and is his own essence and not by participation, therefore God is not a composition of matter and form; (iii) since God is the first agent by Himself, thus, Aquinas concludes that God is not a composition of matter and form (S.T.Q3, 2).

Third, in premise 3, Aquinas asserts that God is not other than His essence or nature. For Aquinas, God is to be identified with His essence. Generally, Aquinas says that material things share each in some specific nature, but individual matter with \textit{accidents} is not entirely identical with it. Thus, since God is no matter, but exists by Himself (S.T.Q3, 3).

\textsuperscript{384} See Chapter 2.4: Compare to the biblical scripture, the church fathers (Augustine’s doctrine of divine simplicity), Christian Creeds (Athanasian Creed).

\textsuperscript{385} See also the similar discussion of God is not any composite in Aquinas, \textit{Summa Contra Gentile}, 16,17,18,20,25,26,27, especially 18.
Fourth, for Aquinas, God is not other than His being (esse) and existence (premise 4). God’s Being is the actuality of essence; it is beyond any potentiality. According to Aquinas, the relationship between God’s essence and being is identity: “being (esse) is not other than His essence.” If God is His being, then God cannot be other than His being, but God exists of Himself. Therefore, God’s First Being is to be (S.T.Q3, 4).

Fifth, according to Aquinas, God is not a genus (premise 5). Aquinas argues that the logical composition of specific difference and generic nature cannot apply to God. Therefore, God is not a genus. Aquinas makes a distinction between two ways of being in a genus: “either absolutely or properly.” But God is neither of these two ways. Let me include here Aquinas’ words,

“[H]e (God) has no genus nor difference, nor can there be any definition of Him; nor, save through His effects, a demonstration of Him: for a definition is from genus and difference; and the mean of a demonstration is a definition.” (S.T.Q3, 5)

Aquinas in the above statement clearly states that God cannot belong to a genus in such a way. Besides, Aquinas also in this fifth premise indicates that we cannot use the word to signify God, because God is not a genus and beyond our knowledge (S.T.Q3, 5).

Sixth, Aquinas also argues that God is not an accidental. According to Boethius’ De Trinitate (On the Holy Trinity), Aquinas observes, since every accident is in a subject, God cannot be a subject; hence God is not an accidental. Aquinas argues that: (i) because in God there is no potentiality, God is not an accidental; (ii) since God is His own being, His being itself cannot have any accidents added to it; and (iii) accidents in God would imply that God would be subsequent upon His substance; however, God is first being, Aquinas say, and “therefore there is no accident in Him” (S.T.Q3, 6).

Seventh, according to Aquinas, God is nowise composite, thus God is entirely simple. Aquinas reviews his foregoing arguments (premise 1 to 6), and since there is no composition in God, he concludes that God is entirely simple (S.T.Q3, 7).

Finally, Aquinas argues that God is not part of any composition of other things. In the preceding arguments, Aquinas excluded any composition in God, here he raises the question whether God can enter into any composition with other things. Aquinas observes that there are all three are wrong positions - can be related to emanation theories, as discussed in chapter 2 – (i) God is the world soul; (ii) God is the formal principle (being) of things; and (iii) God is primary matter. Aquinas renounces these three errors, but affirms his three arguments: (i) God is the first efficient cause; (ii) God is to act in Himself primarily and essentially; and (iii) God is not primary matter, but is absolutely primal being (S.T.Q3, 8).

After all, since God is not any composition as shown above, Aquinas comes to conclude that God is entirely simple (S.T.Q3, 7).
B. **On Being and Essence (De Ente Et Essentia, 1252-6).**

Therefore, it is clear that existence is something other than the essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there is something whose quiddity is *its very own existence*, and this thing must be one and primary…which is existence alone, and this is the first cause (efficient cause), which is God.  

In his earliest treatise *On Being and Essence* quoted above, Aquinas’ view of being and essence is that it is identical to its very own existence. Aquinas further argued that this being (God) must be one and primary, and that it is the first cause. Aquinas uses few examples to clarify his thought. One of them is the composite generic term of human essence. Aquinas also uses this composite generic term of humanity in analysing the following example. One can hold that Socrates is a certain essence in the sense of being predicated of the thing, yet one can also think that Socrates’ essence is not Socrates himself in the sense of being denied the thing. Aquinas further explained that the essence (or the nature) should be understood in two ways. First, we can consider “nothing is true of the essence except what pertains to it absolutely.” Humanity can be perceived neither as one nor as plurality in the nature as it exists. For example, when we say Socrates is white, we also mean that he is human. But we could not describe Socrates as a composition of whiteness and humanness separately. Rather he is a unity, which is a white humanness. Second, “we can also consider [what] the existence of essence has in this thing or in that.” Therefore, Aquinas affirmed that some of what is predicated of a thing can be perceived, for example, that Socrates is white because of his whiteness.

It seems to me that this understanding infers that the essence of a human being is neither identical nor different from a human being itself. Aquinas then turns to explain that essence exists in the first cause (God). According to Aquinas, matter is dependent on form; but form is not dependent on matter. This understanding is important for Aquinas to explain how God is a form without necessary existence in matter. The essence of humanity is a composition of form and matter (a composite substance), but the essence of God is a form that exists without matter (a simple substance). Through this, Aquinas drew out the distinction between the essence of God and the essence of humanity. In Aquinas’ words, for humanity, “the essence of a composite substance or thing is not predicated of the composite thing itself;” unlike humanity. It is because the essence of a composite substance comprises form and matter, whereas the essence of a simple substance is form alone. For God, “the essence of a simple thing, which is its form, … the essence is predicated of it.” For this reason, Aquinas affirmed that God whose quiddity is its very own existence must be one and primary, and He is the first cause. Plantinga refuted such an understanding of divine simplicity as it entails that different properties are not different when applied to God himself, and this makes God nothing but a property. Because of this, Plantinga suggested that this is to hold that God has no nature. We are able to discover from Aquinas’ thoughts that he was well aware of the difficulty Plantinga pointed out. Critiques such as Plantinga have been triggered by philosophers who also contended that “God does not have a quiddity or essence

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386 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence (De ente et essential, 1252-6).*
387 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter IV.*
388 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter IV.*
389 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter II.*
390 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter III.*
391 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter III.*
392 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter IV.*
393 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter IV.*
394 Aquinas, *On Being and Essence, Chapter IV.*
because his existence is not other than his existence.” Nevertheless, for Aquinas, “although God is existence alone, the remaining perfections and nobilities are not lacking in him … he has all the perfections that exist in every genus … in him they are one, while in other things they are diverse.” Aquinas argued that even in light of considerations of a human being we can perceive that God has a nature. For example, when we describe that humanity has one quality, this one quality is related to all other qualities, as this singular quality could affect the operations of all qualities in humanity. Similarly, when God is said to be identical to his very existence, he is also said to have all the perfections that are predicated to him.

Furthermore, for Aquinas, in order to fully understand that God is identical to his existence without ruling out his nature, one must comprehend the distinction between essence in substance and in accidents. Aquinas explained that there are accidents in the essence of humanity such as some substances are simple and others are composite; and essence is in both. But because the essences of these substances are more hidden from us, we ought to begin with the essences of composite substances. Such accidents are consequences from the conjunction of form and matter but are not composed by form and matter. Accidents are the result of the conjunction of form and matter, but not the result of an essence itself. Thus, an accident has neither the aspect of a complete essence nor is it a part of an essence; rather, just as an accident is absolutely and primarily said of substances, and only secondarily and in a certain sense said of accidents, so too does it have an essence only in a certain sense. In contrast, the accidents in the essence of God are not like this. From this point of view, we see that Aquinas holds that God has attributes that are related to His essence; but at the same time Aquinas holds that these divine attributes are not contingent. God’s attributes are real attributes but they are necessary in this sense that God cannot have them. It seems to me that Aquinas’ discourse on being and essence had clearly and sufficiently demonstrated the simplicity of God whose essence is identical to his existence without this ruling out of his attributes.

C. Commentary on the Sentences (Scriptum super libros Sententiariu, 1253-6)

Like other medieval theologians, Aquinas was required to write a commentary on Peter Lombard’s Sentences, a standard requirement for any theologian during the Middle Ages. Aquinas’ Commentary on the Sentences (1 Sentence) is his first theological synthesis (if compared to Summa Contra Gentiles and Summa Theologiae). In the following selected passages from 1 Sentence, Aquinas argued that there is only one God, and God’s attributes exist in God, yet God is entirely simple:

1 Sentence, Distinction 2, Question 1, Third Article (1Sent.Dist.2.1.3)

Aquinas in 1Sent.Dist.2.1.3 addressed the question, “Is the difference in meaning between God’s attributes something that exists in God or only in our minds?” This question

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396 Aquinas, On Being and Essence, Chapter IV.
397 Aquinas, On Being and Essence, Chapter V.
398 Aquinas, On Being and Essence, Chapter V.
399 Aquinas, On Being and Essence, Chapter V.
400 Aquinas, On Being and Essence, Chapter I.
401 Aquinas, On Being and Essence, Chapter VI.
402 Aquinas, selected texts from Commentary on the Sentences (Scriptum super libros Sententiariu, 1253-6).
403 Aquinas, 1 Sentence.
is raised in relation to matter and divine attributes – how are divine attributes predicat
ed of God, really or analogically? Here, Aquinas first outlined the six propositions
that argue that the difference in meaning does not correspond really in God, but only in our minds. After explaining each position, Aquinas immediately examined and pointed out the arguments of his opponents against these positions and responded to them as well. Some opponents said that “God is called perfect because within him exist all the perfections of every class of thing.” Aquinas responded that although there are difficulties in comprehending the divine essence as a simple one, which yet has a multitude of attributes, the multiplicity in meaning, does “name one and the same thing in God.” In saying this, Aquinas argued that multiplicities in meaning do not only arise from our mind in apprehending the meaning, but also actually exists in God. Aquinas posited four criteria to make his arguments, though wisdom, goodness, and the like differ in meaning, they name one and the same thing in God; and the differences in meaning are not just thought up by our minds: they respond to something real in God himself. To make this clear, and thoroughly open up the whole matter – since the understanding of practically everything said in this book [1 Sentence] depends on it – we must look into four points: 

Firstly, when we say attributes differ in meaning, what do we mean by meaning? 
Secondly, what does it mean to say a meaning exists or does not exist in a thing? 
Thirdly, do the different meanings of God's attributes exist in God or not? 
Fourthly, does the multiplicity of meaning arise from our own minds or in some way from God himself?

I hereby further explore what Aquinas means by these four criteria. First, what do we mean by meaning? Following Aristotle, Aquinas answered “the meaning expressed by a word is a definition.” Here, Aquinas indicated that the meaning of a word is what our mind conceives; through which we are able to give a word that defines the meaning. For example, although God’s wisdom itself can’t be defined, the meaning of wisdom can be predicated of God as what we express by the notion of wisdom in our mind. Second, how can meanings be said to be realized in things? Aquinas responded that there are three ways in which human understanding can relate to a thing outside the mind: (1) when we conceived a likeness of something that exists in our mind; (2) when we understand something that exists outside the mind; (3) when neither (1) nor (2) obtains, yet a fictitious concept is realized in the words of expressions. In saying this, Aquinas pointed out that these three ways of meaning are said to be realized in being predicated of God. Third, is the meaning of God’s attributes realized in God? Aquinas rebuked both Ibn Sina and Moses Maimonides who hold...
that “in God nothing else exists but existence…he (God) is existence without nature.” It appears that their premises intend to safeguard the simplicity of God by removing something from God, rather than to attribute something to him. But Aquinas argued that such premises do not necessarily contradict each other. With respect to those right words that we can say about God, Aquinas suggested that their meanings are truly realized in God. Aquinas argued that since God is above our minds, we are only able to express the multiplicity of meanings that arise in our mind that we predicate of God. To Aquinas, such multiplicity of meanings is derived from both our minds and God himself. In sum, Aquinas asserted that the divine essence is truly one yet it also has a multitude of attributes.

1 Sentences. Distinction 8. Question 4. Article 1: Concerning God’s Simplicity

In this article, Aquinas’s exposition of divine simplicity is integrally related to his account of “whether God is entirely simple.” According to his arguments, which I will summarize now, Aquinas contended that God is entirely simple:

Premise 1: God is the first principle, and he is a simple being;
Premise 2: God is the first independent being;
Premise 3: God is its own being without an addition;
Premise 4: God is both the same as his essence and existence, thus the divine attributes and divine names do not produce composition in its being;
Premise 5: God is triune one, not three gods
Conclusion: God is an entirely and truly simple being.

Aquinas first rejects various negations based on denial on the simplicity of God by saying, “God is the first principle, he is not composite.” Aquinas further explained his argument that the unity of divine being of a composite thing is destroyed both in the thing as well as in the mind, therefore it is impossible for God to be a composite being. Aquinas notes that God is a simple being because He is the first principle. Second, Aquinas argues that there are no distinctions between being of God and His existence, “God is, therefore, his own being.” Note that, here, Aquinas repeats his assertion that in God being is without qualification, or more precisely, he is an independent being. Following this, Aquinas begins to respond to the first negation based on the above two premises. For Aquinas, the notion of “being without an addition” is related to two different understandings: (1) on one hand, that God is a being without an addition, can be described as that nothing may be added to God; (2) on the other hand, Aquinas defends that in arguing that “God is a being without an addition,” it follows that “it does not belong to the concept of the thing that an addition may be made to it or that an addition may not be made to it.”

Aquinas, 1Sentences.8.4.1.
See Aquinas, 1Sentences.8.4.1.
See Aquinas, 1Sentences.8.4.1: Aquinas began by presenting various negatives: (1) Since God is a being that is predicated of all things, then God is not simple; (2) if God is most truly a being and is a determinate thing (according to De Hebdomadibus), then God is not simple; (3) since something is predicated of God after it was not predicated, then God is not simple, and (4) since there are three distinct Persons in God – there is some mode of composition in God, thus, God is not simple.

Aquinas, 1Sentences.8.4.1.
Aquinas, 1Sentences.8.4.1.
Aquinas, 1Sentences.8.4.1.
Aquinas’ God is a being that is “what-it-is-as such.” In other words, Aquinas’ notion of God’s being is its own without an addition in both ways.

Aquinas takes up the problem of divine attributes/names and indicates, “It is evident that attributes produce no composition in him.” For Aquinas, premise 1, 2 and 3 clearly assert that God is “a thing determined by the condition of denying from him every addition, …every thing that can be received as an addition is removed from him.” In other words, God is not only identical to His existence, but also identical to His essence, whereas a human is not quite identical with ‘humanity’. To Aquinas, God is not only wisdom but he is wisdom itself: His wise-ness and wisdom cannot be distinguished. By using the following example from Aristotle’s metaphysics, Aquinas further explains what he means: “a knowable thing is relative only because knowledge refers to it. For a knowable thing does not depend on knowledge but vice versa.” Aquinas argues that the attributes and names of God do “not exist in it in reality, but only according to the mind;” however, he asserts that, “the relation exists in reality.” From this it follows that God is identical to his nature or essence, and thus, the diversity of attributes predicated of Him only really exists in the relation and in our minds, and such understanding does not make Him plural.

In responding to the final negation, namely, “Because there are three really distinct Persons in the one essence, there is some mode of composition in God,” Aquinas by adopting the same principle of premise 4 to explain premise 5, argues that if the divine attributes are distinct only in our minds, similar to divine Persons, then the distinction between the divine Persons in one essence is only a merely rational distinction between the three distinct Persons in God. For this reason Aquinas naturally leads one on to raise the question of what kind of Aquinas’ simplicity is really like in relation to trinity, particularly if the divine Persons are distinct in our minds, or more precisely, in ideas only. Nevertheless, throughout the above discussion Aquinas successfully safeguarded his doctrine of divine simplicity in a certain way: God is identical to His essence, His existence, His attributes and His divine Persons, yet He is an entirely and truly simple being.

4.3 THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN ANALYSING AQUINAS’ DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

After exploring Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity in the foregoing discussion on the nature of divine simplicity, we will now answer three other related questions. First, in Section 4.3.1, I seek to answer the question: if Aquinas claims that God is utterly simple without any compositions, how could this understanding be compatible with other divine attributes as indicated in Biblical Scripture, that God is perfect, good, infinite, powerful, present, immutable, eternal, and united? Second, if God is utterly one, it is possible to name God by using multiple divine names (e.g. “The Only Wise God”)? This also entails another question: if God is utterly one, are His noble names (e.g. “I AM WHO I AM”) communicable or knowable to humans? I seek to answer this question in Section 4.3.2. Third, in Section 4.3.4, I attempt to answer: if God is utterly simple, how does Aquinas understand the claim that the Triune God (three Personae – the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) is identified as

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God with one divine nature? Indeed, these are the puzzling central issues concerning the Christian doctrine of divine simplicity.

In his major works (Summa Theologiae, Summa Contra Gentiles, and Commentary on First Sentence), Aquinas carefully discusses the above theological issues at length and in a profound way. Each of these theological issues that Aquinas discussed in these works deserves a detailed discussion and analysis, but due to the limitation of space, I am not going to discuss all the treatises of Aquinas. In the following sections, I have to restrict myself to focus on Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity in Summa Theologiae in relation to the above theological questions, and I will not “jump into” discussing all divine attributes that Aquinas stated in detailed. Rather, I briefly survey what Aquinas intends to say about these theological issues in relation to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Let us now begin our discussion on this central issue of divine simplicity – a Simple God and His other attributes – in Aquinas’ major works (S.T.Q4-Q11).

4.3.1 A Simple God in relation to His other attributes in S.T.Q11, 1-4 (1272-1273)

After he argues for how God has no compositions in S.T.Q3, Aquinas comes to the conclusion that God is utterly simple. But, the next question before Aquinas is: how about other attributes that are predicated to God in the Biblical Scripture, such as divine perfection, divine goodness, divine infinity, divine power, divine presence, divine immutability, divine eternity and divine unity, yet He is a simple God? In fact, when Aquinas argues that God is utterly simple, he also intends to argue that God is utterly perfect, infinite, immutable, and a unity (see S.T.Q3Intro, Q4-Q11). Let me summarize in the following way what Aquinas intends to tell:

Premise 1: If God is utterly simple (S.T.Q3), then
Premise 2: God is also utterly perfect, goodness in general, goodness in particular (S.T.Q4, Q5, Q6);
Premise 3: God is also utterly infinite and present (S.T.Q7, Q8);
Premise 4: God is also utterly immutable, eternal (S.T.Q9, Q10);
Conclusion: All essential attributes considered, God is utterly united or one (S.T.Q11).

In premise 1, for Aquinas, to say “God is utterly simple” is also to affirm His other essential attributes that “God is perfect” and “God is good in general” and “God is good in particular” and “God is infinite” and “God is present” and “God is immutable” and “God is eternal” without making God plural, but a Oneness. If one has basic common sense in worldly affairs, such divine attributes, which predicated in God will definitely make Him plural. However, the mode of divine attributes that are predicated in God is not the case, God is God, human is not. For Aquinas, divine attributes are truly in God, and are not synonyms. It will be great for us to move next into S.T.Q11 to unlock what Aquinas really means when he describes the plurality of divine attributes without making God plural. What is the relationship “within” divine attributes? A plurality of symbolic attributes or a plurality of real attributes in God? In the following, we seek to understand how Aquinas explains these problems.

In S.T.Q11, Aquinas concerning on God’s unity or divine unity, poses four points of inquiry: (i) whether one adds anything to being?; (ii) whether one and many are opposed to each other?; (iii) whether God is one?; (iv) whether God is in the highest degree one? With these questions in mind, Aquinas begins to respond to these four questions one by one.

With regard to question (i), Aquinas argues that One does not “add reality to being (God); but is only a negation of division: for one means undivided being” (S.T.Q11, 1). What
Aquinas means “a negation of division” here is a denial of plurality in God. Aquinas cites Dionysius’ the Divine Names, “nothing which exists is not in some way one,” which would be false if “one” were an addition to being in the sense of limiting it, and thus, one is not an addition to being. In other words, following Dionysius, Aquinas argues that “to safeguard unity of God” is the most fundamental “to safeguard its being” (S.T.Q11, 1). In this sense, Aquinas is arguing that the plurality of attributes is ultimately brought into the singularity of being. Besides, Aquinas disagrees with Avicenna who advocates that the one is the principle of number. For Aquinas, he accords with Plato that, “the one which is convertible with being, does not add a reality to being” (S.T.Q11, 1). Aquinas also asserts that being is both one (divine essence) in a sense of absolute; and many (divine attributes) in a sense of accidental (S.T.Q11, 1).

With regard to question (ii), Aquinas responds in this way: “One is opposed to many” (S.T.Q11, 2). For Aquinas, “to be one” is not “to be many.” Or more precisely, one is one, many is many, it is opposed to each other. Since God is one, He cannot be many. It does not mean that Aquinas denies “many attributes,” he only denies “many” attributes. For Aquinas, many attributes do ultimately and essentially signify to the Oneness (undivided one), not many (divided being). Thus, Aquinas concludes, one is opposed to many (S.T.Q11, 2). In addition, Aquinas also describes a twofold whole: homogeneous and heterogeneous. Aquinas argues that God’s unity is in a heterogeneous sense, not homogeneous. In other words, God’s unity is unity without parts, not unity composed by many parts. In short, the unity of God is “undivided” divine attributes, not “divided” divine attributes (S.T.Q11, 2).

In relation to question (iii): whether God is one? Aquinas states that God is one from the three arguments shown below:

Premise 1: God is utterly simple, so He is one. This is the consequence of what Aquinas argued in the foregoing discussion (S.T.Q3, 1-8). For Aquinas, God’s simplicity is essentially one. It is clear that since God is utterly one, then “He is this God. Impossible is it therefore that many Gods should exist.”

Premise 2: Since God is utterly perfect, then He is one. It is impossible for the perfect one to be two or many gods at the same time. For Aquinas, the perfection of God is also essentially one, not many.

Premise 3: “one is better than many” (S.T.Q11, 3). The unity of the world also implied the order of one. Aquinas says, “[f]or many are reduced into one order by one better than by many: because one is per se cause of one, and many are only the accidental cause of one, inasmuch as they are in some way one” (S.T.Q11, 3).

Conclusion: Since “God is utterly simple” and “God is utterly perfect” and “the unity of the world,” then God must be one. Aquinas cites the Apostle Paul’s “Our God is one” (S.T.Q11, 3).

With regard to question (iv): Whether God is supreme one? Aquinas cites Bernard’s De Clairvaux where he says, “Among all things called one, the unity of the Divine Trinity holds the first place” (S.T.Q11, 4). For Aquinas, “God is supremely one … is supremely being … undivided one … being itself, subsistent, absolutely undetermined … and (see S.T.Q3, 7).” Hence, Aquinas concludes that “God is one in the supreme degree” (S.T.Q11, 4).

In short, for Aquinas, many divine attributes “are not summed up” to God’s unity, but “is undivided” in God’s unity. Aquinas denies “many divided attributes” in God, but he argues for “undivided divine attributes” to safeguard the unity of God. This unity of God does not deny the undivided-distinction within many attributes, but denies the divided-distinction within many attributes. I think Aquinas’ argument in S.T.Q13 is much clearer when he states that God is one and many attributes. Let us now proceed to the next discussion and examination.
A Simple God in relation to His other Names in S.T.Q13, 1-12 (1272-1273)

How can the multiplicity of divine names in Biblical Scripture be applied to God and predicate His unity? For Aquinas, “the multiplicity of divine names” is necessary in relation to His simplicity. Nevertheless, Aquinas contends that the divine names that are named by God Himself in Biblical Scripture, e.g., “HE WHO IS,” is most properly applied to God (S.T.Q13, 1-12, especially S.T.Q13, 11). In this section, I discuss another problem in divine simplicity, namely, the Names of God. What can we say of God? Can we really speak of God? Or, more precisely, “how He is named” (S.T.Q3, Intro.)? To Aquinas, on one hand, we cannot know how God is, but we can know how God is not. On the other hand, we can know how God is known by our knowledge and how God is named according to our knowledge. It is worthy at this moment to overview Aquinas’ framework of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity in his *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas profoundly and carefully orders his arguments accordingly. Let me point out his order:

Aquinas discusses on the divine substance, or more precisely, divine simplicity in this order: [“As hitherto we have considered God as He is in Himself (see S.T.Q3-Q11), we now go on to consider in what manner He is in the knowledge of creatures (S.T.Q12, Intro).” “After the consideration of those things which belong to the divine knowledge, we now proceed to the consideration of the divine names. For everything is named by us according to our knowledge of it” (S.T.Q13, Intro.)]

Then Aquinas moves on to discuss the divine operation in S.T.Q14-Q26: [“Having considered what belongs to the divine substance, we have now to treat of God’s operation. And since one kind of operation is immanent, and another kind of operation proceeds to the exterior effect” (S.T.Q14,Intro)]

In the framework of this comparative study I cannot present an exhaustive survey of the question, but must limit myself to a few pertinent remarks. In S.T.Q12, 7, Aquinas clearly observes “it is impossible for any created intellect (human knowledge) to comprehend God.” But on the other hand, he recalls Augustine unknowable God, “for the mind to attain to God in some degree is great beatitude (*De Verb. Dom.*).” With this in mind, Aquinas continues to assert that since “God, whose being is infinite, is infinitely knowledge. Now no created intellect can comprehend God infinitely. God is called incomprehensible not because anything of Him is not seen; but because He is not seen as perfectly as He is capable of being seen …” [to my knowledge, *incomprehensible* refers to the divine essence in Himself]; thus, “no created intellect can know God infinitely…the created intellect knows the divine essence more or less perfectly in proportion as it receives a greater or lesser light of glory [I think Aquinas meant here the grace of God]” [to my knowledge, *comprehensible* is in the sense of divine essence/attributes/names according to human knowledge]. Having considered all this “comprehensive knowledge,” let me now turn to the discussion of “How God is named.” Aquinas in his S.T.Q13, 1-12, excessively speaks of God’s names. Aquinas begins by posing twelve questions in relation to the Names of God. However, I am not going to discuss all these twelve questions. Rather only focus on the following selected questions:

**Question 4: Whether Names applied to God are synonymous? (S.T.Q13, 4)**

Aquinas answered: It is useless and redundant if God’s names are synonymous names (Aquinas cites Biblical Scripture, Jer. 32:18). Aquinas observes that the Names of God in Biblical Scripture are not synonymous, but “signify the divine substance.” Aquinas argues that though these names are in an imperfect mode, it is clear what has been named in diverse meanings. In his works, Aquinas argues that “for the idea signified by the name is the
conception in the intellect of the thing signified by the name.” Here, Aquinas clearly indicates the distinction between the pre-existence of the name and as it is named in God unitedly and simply, and the names as received divided and multiplied in creatures. We conceive of God by means of “conceptions proportional to the perfections pre-exists in God unitedly and simply, whereas in creatures they are received, divided and multiplied” (S.T.Q13, 4). In short, Aquinas conclusion about human understanding of the divine names is: “Therefore, although the names applied to God signify one thing, still because they signify that under many and different aspects, they are not synonymous” (S.T.Q13, 4).

**Question 11, Whether this name, HE WHO IS, is the most proper name of God? (S.T.Q13, 11)**

Aquinas answered: Aquinas cites and discusses the Biblical Scripture, Exodus 3:13-14, and he clearly responds that “this name HE WHO IS (יהוה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), is most properly applied to God.” It is interestingly here to read the context of God’s name, and then compare to what Aquinas intends to say. In Exodus 3:13-14, we found that “HE WHO IS” (literally means “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE”) in the following passages:

“But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, “I AM has sent me to you.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’ ” (NRSV, Exodus 13:13-14)

What we can read here is this divine name, “HE WHO IS/I AM WHO I AM/I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE,” is revealed by God Himself, “HE WHO IS,” not by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Avicenna, or even Aquinas observations, but GOD SPEAKS. Aquinas in S.T.Q13, 11 asserts that “HE WHO IS” is the best name of God; it signifies God’s very essence. In other words, for Aquinas, since God Himself reveals HE WHO IS, so what the best name or divine name we can properly comprehend God, Aquinas answered, HE WHO IS or Being in Himself. If then, God’s name has been revealed to us. However, Aquinas considered other arguments for this proper name of God (HE WHO IS):

First, “it is because of its signification.” Aquinas explains that since the name “HE WHO IS” does not signify some other form, but “simply existence itself.” For instance, other divine names signify God Himself, and this name is God Himself; it is the most proper name of God (S.T.Q13, 11).

Second, it is also because of “its universality.” Aquinas recalls Damascene’s De Fid. Orth. that “HE WHO IS, is the principal of all names applied to God; for comprehending all in itself, it contains existence itself as an infinite and indeterminate sea of substance.” If I am not mistaken, Aquinas intends to say that it is clear that because other divine names are signified to and derived from this name “HE WHO IS,” then “HE WHO IS” is the most proper name of God (S.T.Q13, 11).

Following Augustine, Aquinas’ third argument is “from its consignification, for it signifies present existence; and this above all properly applies to God, whose existence knows not past or future” (S.T.Q13,11). In fact, these three arguments sum up what Aquinas wants to say about divine attributes in relation to the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity.

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4.3.2 A Simple God in relation to His Uncreated Word/Trinity in S.T.Q28, Q34, Q39

In the foregoing discussions, we have covered the relationship between God’s simplicity and His other attributes and names, now we have to examine how Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity is possible or compatible to another most central doctrine, namely, doctrine of Trinity, in Christianity. I would seek to know in this section of “why the three divine personae does not itself imply there are three gods, rather a simple God to Aquinas. Due to the space and framework of this study, I am not going to present an exhaustive survey of Aquinas’ on divine trinity or triunity. Rather, to limit myself to a few crucial issues in this section: (i) the divine relations in God (S.T.Q28); (ii) the Person of the Son/the Logos (S.T.Q34); (iii) three personae of one God (S.T.Q39).

In Chapter 2, we already briefly surveyed the origin and the development of this doctrine, but it is worth noting here in detail what to know the kind of mode in language uses. The problem of trinity in God’s simplicity is: why do not the three divine personae make three gods, but one God? The phrase “the One being of God in Trinity (Trinity defined as three personae in one essentia)” is not merely in a numerical sense of “one and three,” but One and Oneness (three personae essentially, indivisibly in one divine nature). The problem is not about the vindication of the existence of God as One here, but the identification of Christ as God, as well as the identification of the Holy Spirit as God. How could it be? When a Christian confesses the Athanasian Creed: “…For there is one personae of the Father, another of the Son (the Christ), and another of the Holy Spirit; But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal…” The question here is why these three divine personae of the divine nature do not make three Gods, but one God?

As a matter of fact, historically, this doctrine of the Trinity began with many conflicts and controversies in the early Church period (from 1st century until 4th century), before it came to be recognized and adhere as “the” doctrine of the Trinity in Christian tradition. In the medieval age, Aquinas also received and affirmed this doctrine of the Trinity, when he speaks about God’s simplicity, he also speak about the doctrine of the Trinity. In S.T.Q28, when Aquinas discusses the doctrine of the Trinity, he explicitly states that there are real distinctions in God, in his words, “there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute –namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity – but according to that which is relative (S.T.Q28, 3). Thus, from the above discussion, when Aquinas argues for the doctrine of divine simplicity, he also affirms that this doctrine of divine simplicity does not necessary rule out divine attributes; more importantly, Aquinas’ God is three divine personae in God’s simplicity.

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432 It is worth noting: when early Church Fathers used “hypostases,” later translated in Latin as “personae,” it is not our modern idea of “person” as an individual or unique centre of consciousness; the Latin essentia is from ousia; See also Gregory of Nyssa, “To Ablabius: That There Are Not Three Gods,” in Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. trans. William Moore, M. A: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hnpf205.viii.v.html [Accessed Jan-June 2009]; also similar explanation of personae and essential in Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1985).

433 See also in Chapter 2, section 2.4.

434 Athanasian Creed (AD 500), see also section 2.4.

435 See also in Chapter 2, section 2.4.
4.4 Conclusion Concerning Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity and Transition

Let me finally sum up Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity for further comparative study in the final chapter.

First, according to Aquinas, “God is the most truly simple thing there is” (S.T.Q3,7). This key passage from Aquinas demonstrated that there is only One God. Generally, there is no essential difference between them as concerning God’s essence; in fact, Aquinas stress the denial of plurality in God’s essence, such as no divisible nor quantitative parts in God, no composition of matter and form in God, no essential difference between God’s essence and His existence, etc.. In short, for Aquinas God is completely simple without any compositions. This is the main reason to describe Christianity as monotheistic tradition.

Second, Aquinas in his Summa Theologiae, also divides the divine attributes into two similar attributes, namely, “God’s entitative attributes [God’s attributes]” and “God’s operative attributes [God’s act].” For instance, Aquinas in his S.T. Q2, 1 explicitly says that “we do not know God’s essence…” and also in S.T.Q3.Intro indicates that, “we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not.” Clearly, what Aquinas argue for is the relationship between the unknowable God and His creation in this way: with regards to human imperfect knowledge, we only able to know God’s essence (simplicity of God) in a negative way, we cannot fully comprehend what God is, but only what God is not; on the other hand, we are only able to know God’s attributes through His knowable attributes and names.

Third, Aquinas’ God is Simple Being, God is Perfect, God is Good in general and in particular, God is Infinite, God is being existence in things, God is Eternal, God is Oneness/Unity. God’s essence is identical to His attributes. In addition, for Aquinas, Naming God is only “to signify [analogize] His simplicity, and concrete names to signify His substance and perfection, although both these kinds of names fail to express His mode of being, forasmuch as our intellect does not know Him in this life as He is.”

Fourth, Aquinas describes that the Logos (the Word of God) is the incarnation of Christ, who’s identical with God’s simplicity. In fact, Scripture clearly states that the incarnation of Christ is the Word of God (Logos). The identity of Christ as the Logos had been located in his relation to the Father, the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Apparently, the phrase “three divine personae of one divine essence” seems an illogical positivism: why do not three divine Personae (ousia) make three gods, but one God? As we have seen in foregoing discussion, Aquinas attempts to solve this Trinitarian logic problem by explaining the meaning of Personae in the sense of analogous expression (Person signifies relation). For Aquinas, person means as it were by itself one (per se una); and God’s essence is necessary in unity.

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436 See also Section 3.2.2 (Al-Ghazali) and Section 4.2.2 (Aquinas).
437 See Section 3.2.2 (Al-Ghazali) and Section 4.2.2 (Aquinas).
438 See Section 4.3.4.
439 Aquinas, S.T.Q12,1; see also Section 4.3.4 (Aquinas).
440 See Biblical Scripture: Jn. 1:1, 1 Jn. 7, and also see Section 2.4.
441 See Section 4.3.7; see also Aquinas, S.T.Q28, Q34, Q39.
442 See Section 4.3.7; see also Aquinas, S.T.Q28, 4.
CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AL-GHAZALI AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON
THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

“[God is] one…which has no equal in rank” (Al-Ghazali, Al-Iqtisad)
“we beseech God, in the name of His greatness which transcends all limits,…” (Al-Ghazali, Tahafut)

“… God is the most truly simple thing there is” (Aquinas, Summa Theologiae. Q3,7).
“we do not know God’s essence…” (Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Q2,1).

5.1 EPILOGUE
Divine simplicity is one of many particular divine attributes that should deserve more attention in both Islamic and Christian traditions. Despite the fact that there are a number of critics of Al-Ghazali’s as well as Aquinas’ perceptions of divine simplicity, Aquinas’ and Al-Ghazali’s doctrines of divine simplicity remain fundamental in their respective traditions. There is no reason that Al-Ghazali or Aquinas should not have paid more attention to this particular doctrine than any other doctrines, and it is also the significantly formulations of their views on divine simplicity in respective traditions to drive this study to take part as a dialogue between them. I am not going to repeat the discussion concerning the problem of comparative theology, rather to indicate the methodology of comparative theology. Prof. Vroom vindicated that the method of comparative theology should be in a process of: (i) to establish the comparable categories; (ii) to decide the “truly analogous” between respective traditions; (iii) to decide the characteristics of this comparative categories [hermeneutic circle]; and (iv) to begin a comparative theological discourses and inter-religious dialogue. Given this method of comparative theology, I am now in the position of comparative studies between two thinkers of two traditions on one category, namely, doctrine of divine simplicity.

Though it was impossible for Al-Ghazali and Aquinas to dialogue on this important doctrine as they were from different time periods and both are now dead, it is possible for Christians and Muslims today to dialogue on this doctrine. Thus, I will conclude this study as follows: first, in each section below, I compare the similarities in their perceptions of the doctrine. I then turn to the task of comparison in their differences of the doctrines. It is worth

443 See the discussion of divine simplicity in Islam and Christian traditions in chapter 2.
444 This is my conclusions in chapters 3 and 4.
445 See the discussion of the nature and problem of comparative theology in section 1.4.
noting here that we have before us now both their versions of divine simplicity, but it is a difficult task to identify all the similarities and differences in both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ vast and comprehensive treatises on divine simplicity. It is best, therefore, to narrow the focus to the comparison of their discussions on divine simplicity in their monumental treatises: Al-Ghazali’s *Tahafut* and *Al-Iqtisad*; and Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*; and also to restrict myself to what I think to be four of the most natural aspects of divine simplicity for examining how they are related to the doctrine dealt with by Al-Ghazali and Aquinas (see Section 1.5). Finally, I will revisit the motives and dialogue between the two faiths on the doctrine of divine simplicity with some observations and insights through this study.

5.2 The Similarities and Differences between Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ Perceptions of Divine Simplicity

Clearly, when we compare between Al-Ghazali’s *Tahafut* and Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* on the doctrine of divine simplicity, we may be able to indicate at least three similarities that contain enough overlap between their views of the divine simplicity. First, in speaking of the nature of divine simplicity, both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas believe in the simplicity of God in the sense that He is completely simple without compositions; and they also indicate that God’s simplicity does not necessarily rule out divine attributes. This is because they make a distinction between the relationships of First causes and other causes (effects). Second, with regards to the relationship between God’s simplicity and His creations, both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas assert that the aspects of the nature of God and the nature of humans are similar but not identical. For this reason, God has aspects that are known to us and aspects that are unknown to us; the world’s relations with God are similar to God’s relations to the world but not identical. Third, concerning the problem of divine attributes in God’s simplicity, both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas agree that God’s simplicity does not necessarily rule out divine attributes, but they disagree with their respective conceptions of these attributes with respect to the way in which the attributes are united or overcome in the divine simplicity (see Section 5.3). Fourth, with references to the uncreated Koran and the incarnation of Christ (the *Logos*), both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas believe in the uncreatedness of the Word; but they disagree about the meaning of the uncreated Word. Let us make these common characteristics clearer by way of recapitulating briefly side by side as follows:

5.2.1 The Nature of Divine Simplicity: Being and Existence

First, Al-Ghazali and Aquinas each begin with a commitment to belief in the existence of God, and their God is completely simple, without any compositions in His essence. Both Al-
Ghazali and Aquinas share this similar understanding of the nature of divine simplicity. Let us briefly repeat their views on the nature of divine simplicity:

“[God is] one…which has no equal in rank” (Al-Ghazali, *Al-Iqtisad*)

“… God is the most truly simple thing there is” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Q3,7).

The above key passages from Al-Ghazali and Aquinas demonstrated that there is only One God. Generally, there is no essential difference between them as concerning God’s essence; in fact, both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas stress the denial of plurality in God’s essence, such as no divisible nor quantitative parts in God, no composition of matter and form in God, no essential difference between God’s essence and His existence, etc.. Both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas go on throughout their works to argue for God’s simplicity. It is clear that both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrines of divine simplicity maintain their monotheistic traditions. In short, for both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas God is completely simple without any compositions. This is the main reason to describe both Christianity and Islam as monotheistic traditions.

5.2.2 The Divine Simplicity in relation to the Transcendental Concept: The Unknown God and His Creations

Can we really know God? How much of God can we know? Both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas will answer this way: God’s simple being is to be knowable and to be unknowable with respect to human knowledge. For Al-Ghazali, the relationship between God’s simplicity and His world are said to be similar but not identical because God has aspects that are known to us and aspects that are unknown to us. For example, God is God’s singularity, but the world is not; God is the first cause of the world (effect/causes), but the world is not, etc., Al-Ghazali safely states that God is, in his words, “a [B]eing which is neither outside the world nor inside it.” In that respect, Al-Ghazali may be compared with Aquinas. For Aquinas, he also affirms that God is the first cause, or more precisely, the Maker of the world. Like Al-Ghazali, Aquinas argues for distinguishing God from the world.

In addition, both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas affirm God’s attributes but in different senses. For Al-Ghazali, the meaning of divine attributes is divided into two categories, namely, “the nature of attributes” and “the function of attributes.” Al-Ghazali affirms that the nature of divine attributes are different in their distinct properties as well as in their functions; and they cannot be reduced to one single attribute, but seven essential attributes. Indeed, as

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448 See also Section 3.2.2 (Al-Ghazali) and Section 4.2.2 (Aquinas).
449 See Section 3.2.2 (Al-Ghazali) and Section 4.2.2 (Aquinas).
450 See Section 3.3.3 (Al-Ghazali) and Section 4.3.3 (Aquinas).
451 See Section 3.3.3.
452 Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 26; see also Section 3.3.3.
453 See Section 4.3.3.
warranted by the Koran, there are seven essential attributes that subsisted coeternally with God’s essence. Al-Ghazali, therefore, argues that the seven essential divine attributes are real eternal and co-existent attributes with God, but do not add or make His simple essence plural. After all, to Al-Ghazali, only divine attributes are knowable to human knowledge, not the divine essence. Aquinas, in his Summa Theologicae, also divides the divine attributes into two similar categories of attributes, namely, “God’s entitative attributes [God’s attributes]” and “God’s operative attributes [God’s act].” For instance, Aquinas in his S.T. Q2, 1 explicitly says that “we do not know God’s essence…” and also in S.T.Q3.Intro indicates that, “we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not.” Clearly, what both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas argue for is the relationship between the unknowable God and His creation in this way: with regards to human imperfect knowledge, we are only able to know God’s essence (simplicity of God) in a negative way, we cannot fully comprehend what God is, but only what God is not; on the other hand, we are only able to know God’s attributes through His knowable attributes and names.

### 5.2.3 The Divine Simplicity in relation to the Divine Attributes and Divine Names

Now, let us turn to a comparison of the doctrine of divine simplicity in relation to divine attributes and divine names in Al-Ghazali and Aquinas. Generally, both Al-Ghazali and Aquinas affirm that God’s simplicity does not necessarily rule out divine names and attributes; but when we have a closer examination of their views, we will notice their differences. Let me summarize both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ treatments on this central problem of divine simplicity as follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1: The Summary of Similarities and Differences in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity in relation to Divine Attributes and Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theological Aspects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Attributes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

454 See Section 3.3.4: According to Al-Ghazali, the seven essential attributes of power, knowledge, life, will, hearing, sight, and speech, stated to subsist eternally in God.

455 Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 26; see also Section 3.3.3 and 3.3.4.

456 See Section 4.3.4.

457 This parallel list is summarized from Section 3.3.4 (Al-Ghazali) and Section 4.3.4 (Aquinas).
God’s essence is **not identical, but not different with** His attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theological Aspects</th>
<th>Al-Ghazali’s Doctrine of Divine Simplicity</th>
<th>Aquinas’s Doctrine of Divine Simplicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divine Names</td>
<td>The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God</td>
<td>The “Unknown Name” of God and the “known Name” of God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | For Al-Ghazali, all the ninety-nine divine names are proper names to predicate God, and are essentially reduced to **God’s singularity with seven attributes.** | For Aquinas, Naming God is only “to signify [analogize] His simplicity, and concrete names to signify His substance and perfection, although both these kinds of names fail to express His mode of being, forasmuch as our intellect does not know Him in this life as He is.”  

**5.2.4 Divine Simplicity in relation to the Uncreated Koran and the Incarnation of Christ/Trinity**

Generally, when we encounter Muslims and Christians in interfaith dialogue, we will definitely and unavoidably debate on the major challenging theological theme – the uncreated Logos (the Incarnation of Christ). Interestingly, when we have a closer look at Al-Ghazali’s view on the uncreated Koran, we will trace some similarities with Aquinas’ view on the Incarnation of Christ. In the foregoing discussion, on the basis of seven essential attributes Al-Ghazali argues that these seven attributes of God (including God’s speech) are predicates of God in a real and eternal sense. Aquinas describes that the Logos (the Word of God) is the incarnation of Christ, who’s identical with God’s simplicity. In fact, Scripture clearly states that the incarnation of Christ is the Word of God (Logos). The identity of Christ as the Logos had been located in his relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Apparently, the phrase “three divine personae of one divine essence” seems an illogical positivism: why do not three divine Personae (ousia) make three gods, but one God? As we have seen in foregoing discussion, Aquinas attempts to solve this Trinitarian logical problem by explaining the meaning of Personae in the sense of analogous expression (Person signifies relation). For Aquinas, **person** means as it were by itself one (per se una); and God’s essence is necessary unity. In other words, the intercourse proper to divine essence as revealed in the Christian tradition should be interpreted in this rather paradoxical way: the

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458 Aquinas, S.T.Q12,1; see also Section 4.3.4 (Aquinas).
459 See Biblical Scripture: Jn. 1:1, 1 Jn. 7, and also see Section 2.4 and Chapter 4.
460 See Section 4.3.7; see also Aquinas, S.T.Q28, Q34, Q39.
461 See Section 4.3.7; see also Aquinas, S.T.Q28, 4.
attribution of person of God, expressed both the divine essence and the relation in act with respect to the interior activity of the three Personae, so both God as a cause of His acts, and God as in se personel relations. With this causal activity in mind, Aquinas attempted to develop the argument of maintaining the classical doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of divine simplicity – Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. According to Al-Ghazali, God’s speech (the Word of God/the Koran) is one of the essential divine attributes, and is eternal uncreated Word, but not identical to God. As such, we may observe that this uncreated Word (the Koran) is not merely same as the Christ (Logos) that Aquinas believes. For Aquinas, the Word (Christ) is not only eternal and uncreated, but also is God Himself.

In short, by comparing and contrasting Al-Ghazali to Aquinas on the doctrine of divine simplicity, I hope to repudiate the sharp distinction expressed between these two thinkers and their successors (in my future dissertation). It is my contention that a study of the doctrine of divine simplicity as taught by Al-Ghazali and Aquinas, and it also serve as a pathway to the topic of divine simplicity and the issues involved in the context of Malaysian Christian and Islamic theology. It may helpful to construct the table for grasping the big picture of this study. Let me, therefore, construct the table: the summary of similarities and differences in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity as below:

Table 5.1: The Summary of Similarities and Differences in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theological Aspects</th>
<th>Al-Ghazali’s Divine Simplicity</th>
<th>Aquinas’s Divine Simplicity</th>
<th>The Comparable Aspects between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Being</td>
<td>Ghazali on Simple Being</td>
<td>Aquinas on Simple Being</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on Simple Being = Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary Being</td>
<td>Ghazali on Necessary Being</td>
<td>Aquinas on Necessary Being</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on Necessary Being = Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental Concept</td>
<td>Ghazali on the Transcendental Concept</td>
<td>Aquinas on the Transcendental Concept</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on Transcendental Concept = Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Names and Attributes</td>
<td>Ghazali on Divine Names and Attributes</td>
<td>Aquinas on Divine Names and Attributes</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on Divine Names and Attributes = Agreement &amp; Disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Uncreated Word</td>
<td>Ghazali on the Uncreated Koran</td>
<td>Aquinas on the Incarnation of Jesus</td>
<td>Ghazali and Aquinas on the Uncreated Word =</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

462 See Section 4.3.7; see also Aquinas, S.T.Q28, 4.
463 See Section 3.3.5.
### 5.4 Revisiting Interfaith Motives and Dialogue with New Insights

What I hope to have done in this study is to show not only the important task of interfaith dialogue between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas on this doctrine, but it also provide adequate ways to lead us in speaking of the simplicity of God through what Al-Ghazali and Aquinas say about God’s simplicity. Thus, at the end of this study it may be useful to draw several observations and insights for deepening the interfaith motives and dialogue.

First, this study had unfolded a most significant point, namely, the uniqueness and unknowablity of God in Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ view on divine simplicity, and it deserves a separate study for this complex doctrine in detail. In fact, this study shows that call Christians and Muslims who speak about God’s simplicity have to be aware of both the knowable and unknowable aspects in God’s simplicity.

Second, this study had given us an account of the origin and development of the doctrine of divine simplicity before Al-Ghazali and Aquinas, and we can observe that in order to understand Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity or more precisely, we must be conscious of the diverse versions of this doctrine in the classical-medieval Islamic *kalam* and classical-medieval Christian theology as well. Dialogue about the Islamic and Christian doctrines of divine simplicity, the eternity of the Koran and Trinity shall accept this diversity in both Christian and Islamic theology, and therefore acknowledge that God in se is beyond human understanding.

Third, this study shows that there are similarities and differences between Al-Ghazali and Aquinas on divine simplicity. In other words, this study provided a rubric for both Muslims and Christians who aim at deepening the goal of interfaith dialogue – to achieve “mutual understanding” between faiths, especially between Islamic and Christian doctrines of divine simplicity, one must not only appreciate significantly the common ground between their understandings of divine simplicity, but also acknowledge the vivid differences between their views of divine simplicity. In my opinion, although both Al-Ghazali’s and Aquinas’ views of divine simplicity have enough overlap between their views, they are referring to

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464 See the discussions of unique and unknowable nature of divine simplicity in Al-Ghazali (chapter 3) and Aquinas (Chapter 4).

465 This is my conclusion in chapter 2.
different Gods. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians should be appraised research shows that these two heroes of both traditions have very similar ideas of God.

Finally, it is an undeniable fact that we are now living in an increasingly pluralistic society, and we have more opportunity than ever to dialogue between faiths. So, what is the motivation of interfaith dialogue for maintaining mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians in the pluralistic society? What are the possible themes for interfaith dialogue? Despite that there are many problems in interfaith dialogue (see Section 1.4), this study may enable Christians and Muslims to reconsider interfaith dialogue motivation, in which we can learn the respectful heart. For instance, in the process of this study, I as a Christian, had the opportunity of not only having dialogue with Al-Ghazali’s view on divine simplicity in particular, but also with some Islamic scholars and Muslim friends in general. These series of interfaith dialogue on doctrine of divine simplicity between Christian-Muslim are interestingly fruitful in the following aspects. These series serve to deepening the genuine mutual understanding between two faiths by sharing the similarities of our understandings on this doctrine without endangering our respective beliefs. Moreover, differences between our understandings of divine simplicity can be presented without offending each other. Perhaps, this study also has provided us much more possibilities than we have had for genuine dialogue between faiths, namely, the interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians on divine simplicity!

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466 E.g., the pluralistic and multi-religious society in Malaysia, see chapter 1.
467 This is my conclusion in chapter 2.
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