

# Does Berkeley Anthropomorphize God?

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## Question

Berkeley endorses univocity about religious language, which was traditionally thought to lead to anthropomorphism. Is this charge justified in Berkeley's case?

# Does Berkeley Anthropomorphize God?

- 1 Classical Views on Divine Attributes
  - Motivations
  - Maimonides
  - Aquinas
  - William King
  - Some Critics
- 2 Berkeley's Commitment to Univocity
- 3 The Attributes of Berkeleian Spirits

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## Some Sources

ibn Sina, *Metaphysica*, chs. 21–26; Maimonides, *Guide*, chs. 1.35 and 1.50–52; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, lq3.



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## Problem Three: Non-Synonymy

'Socrates is wise' and 'Socrates is snub-nosed' differ in meaning because, and only because, 'wise' and 'snub-nosed' denote different attributes possessed by Socrates. If Socrates did not have a real plurality of attributes, we could not truly predicate non-synonymous terms of him.

# Maimonides

If one believes [God] to be One and to possess a number of attributes, one in fact says that He is One and *thinks* that He is many. This is the same as what the Christians say: He is one but He is three, and the three are One.

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the description of God by means of negative terms is the only sound description which contains no element of loose terminology.

- *Guide*, ch. 1.58

# What Becomes of Theology?

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## First Strategy: Not About God

Whenever we apprehend one of God's actions, we apply to God the attribute from which the action proceeds. . . For instance, we apprehend the tenderness with which He provides for the formation of the embryos of animals. . . Such action on our part would presuppose affection and tender feeling. That is what we mean by mercy, and we therefore use of God the term Merciful.

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## Second Strategy: Not An Affirmation

we. . . say that [God] lives, meaning that God is not subject to death. . . [we] say that God is eternal, meaning that there is no cause which called Him into being.

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words are related to the things signified by means of the intellectual conception [expressed by the word].

- *Summa Theologiae*, lq13a1, translation modified

## Aquinas and Maimonides

But as regards absolute and affirmative names of God, as *good*, *wise*, and the like. . . some have said that all such names. . . express some remotion from God, rather than. . . express[ing] anything that exists positively in him. Hence they assert that when we say that God lives, we mean that God is not like an inanimate thing. . . and this was taught by Rabbi Moses [Maimonides]. . . we must hold a different doctrine—viz. that these names signify the divine substance. . . although they fall short of a full representation of Him.

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some names. . . can be applied to God only in a metaphorical sense. Other names, however, express [God's] perfections absolutely. . . and such names can be literally applied to God.

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# William King

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observing great Order, Conveniency, and Harmony in all the several Parts of the World. . . we are apt to consider, that we could not contrive and settle things in so excellent and proper a manner without great Wisdom: and thence conclude, that God who has thus concerted and settled Matters, must have Wisdom [and so with the other attributes]. . . And it doth truly follow from hence, that God must have these, or other Faculties and Powers equivalent to them, and adequate to these mighty Effects which proceed from them.

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we ascribe Foreknowledge to God, because we are certain he can't be surpriz'd by any Event, nor be at any loss what he is to do when it happens

- *Sermon on Predestination*, §18

# King and Maimonides

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- But King disagrees with Maimonides in taking words like 'wisdom' to signify some real "Faculties and Powers" in God.
  - In fact, it's not perfectly clear that King even believes in (strong) divine simplicity. His doctrine of analogy has other motivations.

# Summary of Classical Views

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- Because God is perfectly simple in the ways described, we can have no concepts/ideas that properly express what God is like in Godself.
- Yet somehow we manage to think and speak of God.
- To claim that our ordinary concepts/ideas apply to God in the ordinary way (**univocity**) is to lapse into anthropomorphism—it's not much different than holding that God is literally a human-shaped body.

# Scotus' Objection

I call a concept univocal if it is one in such a way that its unity is sufficient for a contradiction to arise when it is affirmed and denied of the same thing. Its unity is also sufficient for its use as a middle term in a syllogism so that we may conclude without committing a fallacy of equivocation.

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every inquiry about God assumes that the intellect has an identical, univocal concept that it receives from creatures.

- *On Being and Cognition*, §39

## Clandestine Atheism

Atheists. . . have commonly had their Vizards and disguises. . . Atheists oftentimes insinuate their Atheism even then, when they most of all profess themselves Theists, by affirming that it is impossible to have any *Idea* or *Conception* at all of God. . . and that no Knowledge or Understanding is to be attribute to him, which is in effect to say, that there is no such thing [as God].

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they. . . are strictly and properly called *Theists*, who affirm that a Perfectly *Conscious Understanding Being*, or *Mind*, existing of it self from Eternity, was the Cause of all other things; and they on the contrary who derive all things from *Senseless Matter*, as the First Original, and deny that there is any *Conscious Understanding Being Self-Existent* and *Unmade*, are those that are properly called *Atheists*.

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*The self-existent and original cause of all things must be an intelligent being.* In this proposition lies the main question between us and the atheists.

- Clarke, *Demonstration*, 38

# Berkeley's Commitment to Univocity

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# Berkeley's Reaction to King

I met with some who supporting themselves on the authority of the Archbishop of Dublin's sermon concerning the prescience of God, denied there was any more wisdom, goodness, or understanding in God than there were feet or hands, but that all are to be taken in a figurative sense; whereupon I consulted the sermon and to my surprise found his grace asserting that strange doctrine. It is true he holds there is something in the divine nature analogous or equivalent to those attributes. But upon such principles I must confess I do not see how it is possible to demonstrate the being of God: there being no argument that I know of for his existence, which does not prove him at the same time to be an understanding, wise, and benevolent Being, in the strict, literal, and proper meaning of the words.

- Berkeley to Percival, 1 March 1709/1710 (Hight 36)



# Hylas's Parity Argument

*Hyl.* Since therefore you have no idea of the mind of God, how can you conceive it possible that things should exist in his mind? Or, if you can conceive the mind of God without having an idea of it, why may not I be allowed to conceive the existence of matter, notwithstanding I have no idea of it?

*Phil.* As to your first question, I own I have properly no idea of God or any other spirit. . . I do nevertheless know that I, who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist. . . Farther, I know what I mean by the terms 'I' and 'myself'; and I know this immediately, or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, a colour, or a sound. . . taking the word 'idea' in a large sense, my soul may be said to furnish me with an idea, that is, an image or likeness of God, though indeed extremely inadequate. For all the notion I have of God is obtained by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its powers, and removing its imperfections.

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  - Berkeley is right about this. See Fasko, “A Scotist Nonetheless?” (2018).

## Crito's Conclusion

LYSICLES. . . . I am confident some author or other has maintained the forementioned notion in the same sense as *Diagoras* [Collins] related it.

CRITO. That may be. But it never was a received notion, and never will, so long as men believe a God: the same arguments that prove a first cause, proving an intelligent cause; intelligent, I say, in the proper sense: wise and good in the true and formal acceptation of the words. Otherwise it is evident, that every syllogism brought to prove those attributes, or (which is the same thing) to prove the being of a God, will be found to consist of four terms, and consequently can conclude nothing. But for your part, *Alciphron*, you have been fully convinced, that God is a thinking intelligent being in the same sense with other spirits, though not in the same imperfect manner or degree.

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as men are ignorant of the true nature of God. This is Scotus's famous objection to analogy (see Fasko). . . ., proving an intelligent being in the true and formal acceptance of the words. Otherwise it is evident, that **every syllogism brought to prove those attributes**, or (which is the same thing) to prove the being of a God, **will be found to consist of four terms**, and consequently can conclude nothing. But for your part, *Alciphron*, you have been fully convinced, that God is a thinking intelligent being in the same sense with other spirits, though not in the same imperfect manner or degree.

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- But Crito does *not* endorse analogy in *any* sense.
  - Contrary to previous interpreters, e.g., Daniel 2011, Curtin 2014, Pearce 2018 (!).
- Further, Crito interprets the result of the divine language argument as supporting univocity.

# The Attributes of Berkeleian Spirits

- 1 Classical Views on Divine Attributes
  - Motivations
  - Maimonides
  - Aquinas
  - William King
  - Some Critics
- 2 Berkeley's Commitment to Univocity
- 3 The Attributes of Berkeleian Spirits

# Divine Simplicity Again

## Types of Complexity Denied

- Mereological
- Really (metaphysically) distinct attributes
- Substance/attribute
- Form/matter
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A spirit is one simple, **undivided**, active being. As it perceives ideas, it is called the 'understanding', and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the 'will'.

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the very notion of what is called 'matter'... involves a contradiction in it.

– *Principles*, §9

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701. the Substance of Spirit we do not know it not being knowable. it being **purus Actus**.

828. The Will is **purus actus** or rather pure Spirit, not imaginable, not sensible, not intelligible. in no wise the object of  $y^e$  Understanding, no wise perceivable.

829. Substance of a Spirit is that it acts, causes, wills, operates, or if you please (to avoid the quibble  $y^t$  may be made on  $y^e$  word it) to act, cause, will, operate & it's [*sic*] substance is not knowable not being an Idea.

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This is a denial of univocity!

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But what about the tulip passage? (*Dialogues* 195–197)

See Migely 2007; Daniel 2018.

# Thinking and Speaking of Spirits

it will be objected, that if there is no idea signified by the terms 'soul', 'spirit', and 'substance', they are wholly insignificant and have no meaning in them. I answer, those words do mean or signify a real thing, which is neither an idea nor like an idea, but that which perceives and wills and reasons about them. What I am myself, that which I denote by the term 'I', is the same with what is meant by 'soul' or 'spiritual substance' . . . as we conceive the ideas that are in the minds of other spirits by means of our own, which we suppose to be resemblances of them, so we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which in that sense is the image or idea of them, it having a like respect to other spirits that blueness or heat by me perceived has to those ideas perceive by another.

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I have no idea of spirit but somehow manage to signify it. (Cf. Aquinas on God.)



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How?

By means of the resemblance of other spirits to myself. (Univocity)

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Berkeley doesn't have an anthropomorphic God—he has theomorphic humans!

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