

## 5: Evaluate the claim that we can only know God through experience (25)

*Note: when not within quotes as corrections, sections inside square brackets are clarifications/slight rewording of what I had written. I did this after the essay to clarify some very confusing sentences where I didn't understand what I was saying until several minutes of reflection.*

The claim proposes that only a posteriori experience allows us to “know God.” I will argue that because of Divine Simplicity, other a priori knowledge of God is impossible. Furthermore, the language suggests knowing God directly as a person, not of God, which I shall propose is only possible a posteriori. When combined with the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, “know[ing] God” is only possible as experiencing pure Being indirectly; because of the human perspective, this experience will not be certain nor perfect, the ego projected onto God must be withdrawn such that—as I shall argue—“know[ing] God” is only possible as a denial of the self and experience of God as Being. This is not the clearest intro, Kasi?

The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) refers to God's oneness of being, in that God *is* the attributes associated with and metaphysically and ontologically One. This means that God is identical to these attributes and is the attributes themselves. God cannot, therefore, be defined as this defies our conceptual and linguistic ability to define things, as Davies and Aquinas argue to different ends, and it is not anything other than God's self—God is pure Being; there is no “being x” or “having y”, simply a “Being”—*suum esse*.

Have you been reading Descartes?

However, my gentle reader might object to the logical soundness of God being *ipsum esse subsistens*, or DDS itself. Davies, for example, takes issue with Aquinas' statement that “God is existence”: it is a misunderstanding of what existence is. If existence is not a predicate, but a property of a concept which tells us there are instances of itself, then to say God is existence tells us nothing: it is a meaningless tautology. Furthermore, God in Judeo-Christian thought is considered as having some

distinct properties—namely omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence—which are evidently not the same, and reducing God to a property instead of the expected person. Plantinga argues this is incompatible with the image of God in classical and modern theism.

To the first I agree wholeheartedly, but for the reason that *this* is the reason God cannot be said to exist or not exist. Doctrine of God transcending humans I find to extend to also transcending existence due to the unique nature of God's Simplicity. "Being" itself cannot be said to exist, it is an object within or without Being which leads it [the object] to exist, of which God is not [not within without Being, as God *is* Being]. Therefore one sidesteps the issue [of predicating existence or God is existence] by affirming and holding God as transcending existence through simplicity and uses this argument against DDS as an argument for this separate aspect of my argument. Furthermore, this leads to an impossibility for any theism, not just classical and modern—if theism is the position that "God exists." I do not find this to be a weakness, but a strength: it serves to separate God from restraints of theism and serves as a criticism of organised religion; to [dogmatically] claim God exists as organised religion [does] contradicts God as Being, God would not be God. [Very good.](#)

As for Plantinga, I find the logic of properties being the same [is unsound]. God can be identical to characteristics without them being the same and therefore have different characteristics; just as  $4x$  and  $x^2$  are different expressions but can both be the same when  $x=4$ . The issue is treating these characteristics as exclusive, static parts of God—not to mention the contradiction this is to DDS—and not recognising human perspective. It is entirely possible for power, knowledge and love to be different as *we* perceive them: when talking of God, they are not; when perceiving God imperfectly (due to transcendence), we do not recognise them as such.

To the criticism of reducing God I counter that this simply recognises God as *fundamentally different* and is an error of anthropomorphism to imply that this pure

Being is not a person—or lacks some [sense of] personhood—and that the personal relationship of God is nonetheless possible: one does not need to be distinctly the human idea of a human person to be so, or to have meaningful relation to.

This leads to the “know[ing] God” as a person. It is not possible to “know” a person—referring to understanding some sense of nature and experience [of] them—a priori. One cannot find the impression one gains, from the meanings of the terms of an unexperienced person, with pure logic. Even if it was possible to know some essence of a person and experience their effect without the actual experience, God transcending us removes this. Not to mention that God *evades* definition from Simplicity. Nonetheless, the thought experiment of Jackson for the knowledge argument may be used for this [idea of having to experience a person to know them].

To “know” a person or object in the way language is being used—not “know *of* x”, but “*know* x”—is the qualia one obtains necessarily a posteriori. Objections to the argument or to qualia do not distract from the idea that knowing a person [or some other thing in this mode of knowledge] necessitates experience: gaining a new ability such as in the ability hypothesis requires experiencing to enable the ability “to know”, the acquaintance hypothesis uses qualia as “physical properties of *experience*”, and the distinction of metaphysical and linguistic physicalism still admit the requirement of experience. The objection that Mary does not gain any new knowledge I find difficult to accept, yet if knowing everything means knowing the experience [without experiencing it] it is nonetheless impossible for us to do this practically. Although I admit this last point, even if it were theoretically possible to know everything [about something] in this way, one cannot know this of God. All one can know of God is as being Being, [or] One, as that is all there is [to God’s essence] and cannot understand as this transcends us.

True, one could propose a hypothetical second being who is also simple and thus not transcended by God, yet this would not be a second Being; it would be one and the

same. Therefore, if anything, the criticism of the Ontological Argument that only God could use it soundly and the premises be valid for, applies too to the idea of knowing God without a posteriori experience.

The alternative of knowing God not as a person but as a non-person, I shall say object, may be posited by some. Notwithstanding the argument from transcendence [when the following is applied to God], it is possible to find an object a priori. If the object is a tautologous concept such as  $2+2=4$ , knowledge of this is certainly possible, as [it] is of knowledge from definitions (again, ignoring the obvious objection [for God]). For this, however, we only gain knowledge *of*, not the knowledge of the “to know”.

Furthermore, this knowledge is impersonal and only knowledge of what we define. It is comparable to know of God in this was as [considering God as] the Ich-Es of Buber. A posteriori knowledge of active experience of God then is the Ich-Du; a priori knowledge of God as Ich-Es is imply the Doctrine of Divine Simlicity, of God as Being; a posteriori knowing God as the Ich-Du is experience of Being to know God. Therefore, to “know God through experience” is to hold a personal knowledge-relation of Being through [Ich-Du] experience, a posteriori.

However, my attentive reader may find a conflict between this knowing God a posteriori if God [also] be Simple, therefore transcendent of existence and us.

To this I answer with an application of Weil’s metaphysics: God [as Being] steps back—but not above, thus horizontally transcending us through difference—so that other, non-simple, entities [—that which is not pure Being, but negations in it—] may enter existence through this [opening of of Being] and be possible within it. Thus we experience Being as [negation of] our own existence and of everything which does and does not exist. We know God through our human perception of existence and being as we know God’s characteristics—for lack of a better word—such as love,

power, and wisdom [through the] imperfect, humanised versions of love, power and wisdom.

**\*\*** An immediate criticism is that we are not experiencing God but our own ideas of God [∴ perfect being cannot come from imperfect existence, God is the qualities we value “amalgamated without limit”, as the Humean might put it]. This I take to be the common state, and mostly true for the majority. The human experience of existence and [this] separated Being projects the own ego onto God. This is the reason why [our human] understanding of power, love and knowledge is commonly misattributed [when] in reference to God and even other non-simple entities [which are not us]. One must intentionally remove this ego as projected onto Being; in an act of denying the self’s narcissism to anthropomorphise everything to it and hold itself as different and above, closer perception for knowing God is obtained by removing this humanisation of God and everything else [to the ego]. By removing the ego and holding everything as equal but different—only horizontally transcendent—then it is possible to “know God” away from perception. This is a further criticism against organised religion, as it claims universal solution and imposes itself and own ideas onto Being instead of leaving it as itself: “knowing God” must be a personal experience of existence within and without Being through self exploration and reflection [, not one which is dogmatically imposed onto God].

Nonetheless, the reader may be unconvinced this is ever possible—perhaps they are a Nietzschean perspectivist, say. To this I answer that regardless of if any true separation [or non perspective experience] is possible, it is simply the understanding of one’s own perspective which is needed to recognise the imperfect act of knowing God [which leads] to know God. By admitting one’s own perspective and recognising it[s influence], one knows God as Being Ich-Du as well as one could anyone [else as a person in this world.] [Therefore to object that we cannot know God because of this perspective requires holding that we cannot know anyone, which is only true insofar as perfect knowledge of them is claimed and this is not the case].

Humean criticisms of causation and necessary cause do not affect this idea of knowing God through experience. The issue of analogy is, I find, aptly covered by the above too. One does not claim perfect knowledge of a person [, which would only be possible with an impossible entire experience of that person, ] and neither of God, simply the Ich-Du relationship that one knows Being [with, in an] a posteriori [way] and even admits the horizontal transcendence of Divinity [and everything which is not us]: it is indirect knowledge through direct experience of God's allowance for existence and everything following from this which [allows us to experience God.]

To finalise, Divine Simplicity and transcendence necessitate that one cannot "know God" a priori, and knowing God is fundamentally an a posteriori experience of Being—and interaction with the metaphysical experience of the world as it is and is not, free from constraints of theism and organised religion [in favour of a personal experience and Ich-Du relationship with God through experience of the world].

Where do I start? This is an extraordinary piece of writing - that addresses the question in a most unusual Manner.

This question is intended primarily to prompt discussion about the arguments for God but you have interpreted it to focus on the interplay between the nature of God and the human experience of the divine (I Think?) .

A valid and creditable reading of the title, but one fraught with difficulty given you haven't reached this part of the course yet?! Have you been reading beyond the confines of our course? If so - well done! Which texts?

You have drawn on a wide range of knowledge here and there are clear examples of critical analysis - see most of p2.

My only pointer would be to consider the expression of language - we have lost clarity of expression in a few places, especially when moving from one line of enquiry to another. Would this be accessible to all examiners – I hope so, but cannot guarantee it. Also, you do drop in a few terms that we should define (e.g. qualia).

However - very impressive, very intriguing...