

God's Oneness: The Kinds of Attributes God Does Not Have

- Argued by Plato: nothing corporeal can be truly one – i.e., truly a unity – because anything corporeal is at least theoretically divisible. If we cannot actually divide something corporeal, this establishes only our limitations, not the thing's oneness
- Maimonides: There is no true oneness except in "*one simple essence in which there is no complexity or multiplication of notions*" (p. 157) – that is, no division of any kind, even at the merely conceptual level
- 4 Kinds of Attributes that Cannot be Predicated of God—and Why (pp. 157-61)
 - Any essence (expressed by a definition)—because God cannot be defined
 - Any part of an essence (part of a definition)—because God is not a composite
 - Any qualities—because only composite things have qualities. Qualities are "accidents," that is, properties that a thing happens to have in addition to its essence. Example: a human has in addition to an essence (rational animal) various qualities of size, shape, color, etc.
 - Any relations—because God has no relation to anything else
 - God cannot be related to place because God is incorporeal
 - God cannot be related to time because time is "an accident of motion," and only bodies move
 - God cannot be related to anything created because relations exist only between things of the same species

Why We *Can* Attribute Actions to God

(pp. 161-64)

- It is possible for one simple (noncomposite) essence to perform different actions. Thus we can speak of God's actions without giving the erroneous impression that God has different powers or capacities
- Argument by analogy with fire: Even though fire acts in different ways on different substances – burning, bleaching, blackening, etc. – it produces all of these different effects through only one active quality (heat)
- Argument by analogy with human reason: We ourselves produce a much wider variety of actions than creatures lacking reason and will. We weave cloth, build houses, solve geometrical problems, govern cities, etc. – and yet we do all of these things through a single rational faculty
- The limits of both analogies: Maimonides uses them only to show that one and the same thing, even in our experience, can produce a variety of different actions. He does not mean to imply that God has some “active quality” or some “rational faculty.” As we cannot know what God is, so we cannot know *how* God produces different effects

God Has No Similarity or Likeness to Anything Else

- The argument: Similarity is a kind of relation; God has no relation to anything else; therefore, God has no similarity or likeness to anything else (pp. 170-71)
- Objection: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26)
- Replies—with a warning against using words equivocally:
 - “Image” cannot be taken literally, because God is incorporeal. “Likeness” refers to the rational capacity of human beings, which no other creatures have, but even this is not a true comparison (Book I, ch. 1)
 - There can be no true comparison because comparisons can be made only when the notion in question is *univocal* (used with the same meaning), not *equivocal*. Hence we cannot even say that God is more perfect than humans because we would be using the word “perfect” equivocally. (Example: when we use “bat” to mean both a flying mammal and a wooden stick used in baseball, we are using “bat” equivocally)
 - Even when we say “God exists,” we are using the word “exists” equivocally, because only God’s existence is uncaused and identical with His essence (pp. 171-72). All creatures exist “accidentally”—meaning that they might happen to exist at a given time, but it is equally possible that they won’t

The Negative Theology of Maimonides

- We can say what God *does* (in terms of the effects of God's actions), but we cannot say what God *is*. "...We have no correct way of describing Him unless it be through negations" (p. 173). Example: "God is not dead" (vs. "God is living")
- People who contemplate how radically God differs from us will become increasingly aware of their own ignorance of God and their incapacity to speak about him (p. 176)
- People who continue thinking of God in anthropomorphic terms, who even affirm that God has positive attributes (say, by claiming "God is good"), *do not even believe that God exists* (p. 182). Because whatever it is they are praising is something other than God, they are no better than *idolaters*
- Thomas Aquinas's objection about theological language: Although some words that we use in talking about God should be understood as negations (such as "incorporeal" and "infinite"), we do not mean by "God is good" merely that "God is not bad." In a case like this we are using the word "good" neither univocally nor equivocally but *analogically*—that is, by analogy with good as humans know it

Human Perfection: How We Should Live (and Why)

(pp. 184-89)

- The true or greatest human perfection is *intellectual*: the attainment of true opinions regarding God. This perfection alone brings the individual “permanent perdurance” (immortality), which is the ultimate goal (“end”) of human life. “...You ought to desire to achieve this thing, which will remain permanently with you and not weary or trouble yourself for the sake of others” (p. 186)
- *Moral* perfection is a disposition to be useful to other people. This is a prerequisite for intellectual perfection but is *not* the greatest perfection. If you lived alone, having nothing to do with other people, your moral virtues would be useless
- All actions and moral habits prescribed by the Law are preparations for the ultimate end of intellectual perfection
- The command to imitate God’s ways, especially God’s loving-kindness, means that we should try to help or harm others according to what they deserve, rather than being motivated by the passions that normally lead us to help/harm others. God cannot have any passions because *all passions are evil* (pp. 167-68, 188)