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**The Essence of God and the Identity of God**

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## The Essence of God and the Identity of God

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### Abstract

What we believe about the essence of God does not provide any specificity for the identification of God? Without specificity, we cannot identify God, should God encounter us. *Necessity* related to causality, a priority, or analyticity, cannot establish the identity of God. If what we know about God cannot identify God, then we can only establish what causality, *apriority*, and analyticity purports regarding the essence of God. Everything that is exists with specificity or identity (Kripke). If God exists God exists with an identity, but we do not have any information as to what that identity might be. In this paper, an attempt is made to show that if all the information about God cannot establish the identity of God, then the search for empirical proof amounts to nothing. If what we believe about God cannot provide an ontological identity then we must extrapolate the relevance of God from the relevance of the questions as to why we choose to believe in God. Sacred texts do not provide any tangible identifying marks of God for its believers. Calvin's *Sensus Devinitatis* does not give believers any specifics that can identify God as God. Descartes's *logical necessity*, Swinburne's *factual necessity* and Plantinga's *metaphysical necessity* of God does not establish any identifiable essence. As such, the essence of God derived from *apriority*, analyticity, and causality simply impinges on the significance of *necessity* that purports beliefs for ontological necessity. The ontological necessity of God can be best understood in the context of the Leibnitz's question — why is there something rather than nothing? It is argued that God is definable and believable but not identifiable.

**Keywords:** Identity, apriority, analyticity, necessity, Epicurus, Calvin, Leibniz, Kripke, Plantinga, Descartes, Swinburne, the essence of God.

## Introduction

Epistemically speaking *dedicto* or *de re* beliefs<sup>1</sup> that God exists, or necessarily exists, cannot identify God for the believer. That is why we can know about God without knowing whether we can identify God, should we encounter God.<sup>2</sup> Knowing about God does not include knowing how to identify God. Without having any *a posteriori* specificity related to God's identity we cannot acknowledge the reality of God. *Necessity*, be it causal, logical, or metaphysical, cannot provide for God's identity. *Necessity* related to causality, apriority, and analyticity can only establish the ontological necessity of God, not the ontological identity of God. Only *a posteriori* necessity related to actuality or factuality can establish ontological identity, of which we have no specificity. While Descartes's *a priori* necessity establishes the ontological necessity of God, only Kripke's understanding of *a posteriori* necessity based on actuality can establish the ontological identity of God. Ontological necessity without an ontological identity can only postulate belief in God as a *belief-decision*<sup>3</sup>—a decision for or against the concept or essence of God. Kripke's understanding of *a posteriori* necessity declares 'specificity' as the basis for identity. Water is H<sub>2</sub>O. According to Kripke, it is this that establishes the metaphysical claim that only what is H<sub>2</sub>O is water.<sup>4</sup> Without any specificity for God's identity, all we have are the questions that necessitate such beliefs, such as Leibniz's question, why is there something rather than nothing?<sup>5</sup> Based on Leibniz question, apriority and analyticity can only establish the *de dicto* or *de re* necessity of God. *De dicto* beliefs define the necessity for God and *de re* beliefs define the necessity of God or purports that God necessarily exists. If God exists, God must have a rigid identity, but we are unaware as to what that identity might be. If we cannot establish the 'is' of specificity, we cannot establish the 'is' of identity.<sup>6</sup> Without the 'is' of identity we cannot acknowledge God should God encounter us. There is a difference

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<sup>1</sup>Justin Broackes, *Belief DE Re and DE Dicto*, *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950) Vol.36, No 144 (July, 1986), 374. Here, Broackes defines that Belief *de dicto* is belief of a certain dictum or proposition that is true and *de re* is belief about a particular res (thing) having a certain property. The two Latin terms mark a distinction in intentional states. The ambiguity can be seen between the believer and reality; between the believer and the proposition and between reality and the proposition. The ambiguity exists in three levels—syntactically, semantically and metaphysically.

<sup>2</sup> The *Electra paradox* (Electra knew that Orestes was her brother but did not realise that the man before her was her brother.) highlights the possibility of knowing something but not being able to identify what is known. In the God-paradox we can know that there is God (*de dicto*) but not know God as God should we encounter God, because we do not have any *a posteriori* specificity that can identify God as God?

<sup>3</sup> Tennyson Samraj, *What is Your Belief Quotient* (Indiana. Author House, 2007), xiii. I coined this expression to mean that all beliefs related to God are in realitybelief-decisions—for or against the concept of God

<sup>4</sup> Saul A Kripke *Naming and Necessity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 116, 128

<sup>5</sup> G.W. Leibniz, "The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason," in *Leibniz Selections*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, *The Modern Student's Library* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 527.

<sup>6</sup> Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 97-98, 128, 142.

between establishing the necessity of God and establishing the identity of God. God as God can be acknowledged only if we can establish *a posteriori* identity.

### **What the believer who Believes must know about Belief**

Before 1980 the distinction Locke, Hume and Kant made between a priori and a posteriori truth was unchallenged. Some things were true in all possible worlds, and some things were true in a given world. However, Kripke argued once *a posteriori* truths were established they are also true in all possible worlds. If we hold that God is *the* uncaused cause or that there can be only one uncaused cause, then it becomes imperative to establish the identity of God. For only that being can be *the* uncaused cause. Why are we cognizant of something rather than nothing. Beliefs are either basic or non-basic,<sup>7</sup> empirical or rational, but beliefs are best understood when defined as being *de dicto* or *de re*. *De dicto* beliefs deal with the dictum or propositions, whereas *de re* beliefs deal with a particular property or certain claims related to a particular subject. *De dicto* claims can be made without any particular existent in mind, but we cannot make any *de re* claims, without having an existent in mind. Concerning God, claims, be it *de dicto* or *de re*, cannot provide for any tangible identification. We can believe in the *de dicto* or *de re* existence of God without knowing the identity of the existent in question. This is the ontological concern related to God. So, while *de dicto* beliefs do not require particular existence, *de re* beliefs require a particular being having a given identity. But we do not have any *a posteriori* identification that can establish the *de re* identity of God. Three hundred years ago what we knew about water did not include knowing what identifies water as water. We knew that water sustained life, but we did not know that two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen is what constitutes and identifies water as water. But once we knew that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, we can make the metaphysical claim that only what is H<sub>2</sub>O is water in all possible worlds. Similarly, we can know (*de dicto*) that there is God but not be able to identify God without having any specifics related to identity. Until such times, belief in God must be strictly for the reasons why we believe in God. If God is the answer to the questions of life, then the relevance of God can only be understood in the context of the relevance of the questions that necessitates such a concept and belief.

We are not the first to believe or disbelieve in God, and we will not be the last. What does the essence of God mean if what we know about God cannot identify God for the believer? Does anyone who is immortal automatically qualify to be God? Should we encounter God, who we would encounter, would have to be *that* which does not have a beginning and cannot cease to exist? If *de dicto* or *de re* beliefs cannot provide the identity of God, then the believer (*de se*) cannot identify God as God. What then is the significance of what we know about God if we cannot identify the reality of God? Though we cannot

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<sup>7</sup> Beliefs are either supported or not supported by other beliefs. If they are supported, they are considered as non-basic if they are not supported they are considered as basic.

identify God, we can believe in God as the causal explanation for the universe. However, we can know about God without choosing to believe in God, but we cannot believe in God without knowing why we choose to believe in God. The question under investigation is not whether God exists or necessarily exists—the question is, should God exist or necessarily exist, can God be identified with the information we have? God is definable but not identifiable from the definition of God. God like gold is definable but God, unlike gold<sup>8</sup> is not identifiable because we do not have any *a posteriori* information related to the identity of God. Not being identifiable does not mean that God does not have an identity—we just do not have any information related to God’s identity.

Is understanding the essence of God tied up with the explanation of the universe or is it tied up with the identity of God? When ontological necessity is tied up with the explanation of the universe, it is related to causal necessity. When ontological necessity is tied up with God, it is related to factual necessity. One deals with why we believe in God the other deals with the nature of God. *A priori* necessity cannot establish ontological identity. Only *a posteriori* necessity can establish the identity of God. What is the distinction between *a priori* necessity and *a posteriori* necessity? *A priori* necessity when understood in the context of analyticity establishes metaphysical necessity, in that, what is established is true in all possible worlds. Similarly, when *a posteriori* necessity is understood in the context of factuality or specificity, the established identity is true in all possible worlds. The definition that water is H<sub>2</sub>O does not only identify water as water but also establishes water as water in all possible worlds. Only what identifies God as God can identify God as God in all possible worlds?

We shall in the next section look at different reasons cited for God’s existence and note whether or not they provide for any identification of God. An attempt is made to extrapolate the identity of God from the *de re* essence of God. However, if we cannot establish any specificity for identity, then we can only establish the *a priori* necessity of God without the *a posteriori* necessity as the basis for belief. What does it mean to know and believe if we cannot establish the ‘is’ of identity? Can something be true in all possible worlds without establishing the ‘is’ of identity? After 1980 or after Kripke’s notion that the ‘is’ of identity once established can be held as true in all possible worlds. This can be held as true for God also. Once *a posteriori* identity is established, we can argue for *a posteriori* necessity. Identity is fundamental if one is to confirm and establish the reality of God. However, confirmation of identity can only establish the reality of God not the truth of monotheism. God has an identity but is unknown. However, we cannot establish the basis for an identity for monotheism. The ‘is’ of location, the ‘is’ of predication, and the ‘is’ of existence cannot establish ‘is’ of identity. However, the ‘is’ of identity can only establish a particular existent--which in-and-of-itself cannot establish monotheism. Whatever the identity of God might be, the being that is identified as God must be a being that is without a cause, without beginning and cannot cease to exist.

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<sup>8</sup>. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 117, 123-24

## What People Believe and the Identity of God

### *Immortal- God*

People choose to live believing that God is immortal. Can this belief, that God is immortal provide any identity for God's existence? If all those who claim God necessarily exists cannot provide identification for God then what we have, are simply reasons why we choose to accept or reject the immortality of God. Any proof for God's existence or necessary existence cannot provide an identity. However, if we can argue that every entity has an identity, then to exist implies having an identity.<sup>9</sup> Without any identification for the reality of God, we can only establish the relevance of the questions that necessitates such belief, but we cannot verify the truth of such beliefs. Most *revealed texts*<sup>10</sup> suggest that God is immortal. But, this only confirms what humans have always known (by reason) that non-contingent existence is considered as necessary because the question of *causal necessity* raises the question of regression. The regression question posits the *necessity* for the uncaused cause. Further monotheistic religions argue that to acknowledge the immortality of God, is at its best when we hold that there can be only one uncaused cause. However, this is difficult to establish without revelation. Most *revealed texts* tell us that God is immortal,<sup>11</sup> which according to Epicurus is the only attribute that should be associated with God.<sup>12</sup>

### *Creator-God*

Can belief that God is the creator provide any identification for the creator God? For many people, Leibniz's question "Why is there something rather than nothing" is the basis for their belief in God. Either there was a time when the universe did not exist, or there was never a time when the universe did not exist.<sup>13</sup> If the universe has a beginning then either there was an intelligent cause (God) or an unintelligent cause (big bang). The existence of the universe raises the question of the cause of the universe. The *de dicto* necessity for God is significant here. If there is a chair, there is a chair maker regardless of whether we see the chair maker or not. Similarly, if there is a universe, there is a universe maker, regardless of whether we can see the universe maker or not. It is easy to accept that the universe has a creator even though we do not have any clue as to the identity of the creator. It is easy to acknowledge God as the creator of the

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<sup>9</sup> Entities can be exactly the same, but it does not mean they are one and the same. Leibniz has shown us that every entity has an identity.

<sup>10</sup> The Christian Bible, The Muslim Quran, The Jewish Torah or the Hindu Vedas does not reveal any identity related to the reality of God.

<sup>11</sup> I Timothy 1:17

<sup>12</sup> Epicurus "The good life" George Sher, *Moral Philosophy* (Belmont, Wadsworth Group, 2001), 616.

<sup>13</sup> If Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell are right when they argue that there has never been a time when the universe did not exist, then everything that exists, exists without cause, without reason, without purpose.

universe. However, it is difficult to address the questions-why there can be only one creator-God or why the creator does not reveal any specifics (revealed or otherwise) that can identify the creator.

There is a significant concern related to God as creator. If we hold that God is God because of creation then what was God before creation? In other words, if God is God because of creation, then before creation he could not have been God. We know that if God is God before creation and not because of creation, then creation cannot be the defining basis for God being God. Therefore, God is God independent of creation. God would have to be God both before and after creation. If God is and was God before creation not because of creation, what then, defines God as being God? Only what identifies God as God can make God as God. X may be a professor. However, it is not one's profession that makes X as X. It is the identity of X that makes X as X. Creation might point towards necessity for the creator but, being a creator is an incidental feature of being, not the identity of being.

### *Necessity and Identity*

Can *a priori necessity* related to causality, apriority, or analyticity without establishing *a posteriori* necessity identify God as God? *A priori* necessity establishes the ontological necessity of God, but without *a posteriori* necessity, we cannot establish the ontological identity of God. Necessity be it causal, logical, or metaphysical, cannot provide the identification for God, only factual or a posteriori necessity can establish identity. The mere fact that God is an ontological given cannot establish the identification of God for us. Logical necessity ascribed to triangles, circles, and squares can be held as true based on apriority. However, if the concept of God is held as true by definition and is considered true in all possible worlds (but is unidentifiable), then the acceptance of such truth poses a unique challenge. Whether we could or would believe in God depends on why we choose to believe in the *de dicto* necessity of God. While *a priori* necessity can establish the *de dicto* belief in God, only *a posteriori* necessity can establish the *de re* identity of God. The *de dicto* belief of God posits the causal necessity of God. The necessity of the uncaused cause is justified to avoid the cycle of regression, but can this claim justify the monotheists claim that there can only be one uncaused cause? What justification can we give to the idea that God is eternal, uncaused, necessary and one? If we believe that triangles, circles, and squares have no 'birth' or 'death' and that we can only comprehend such realities by a given mind, then it is necessary to envision one eternal mind where such realities exist from which other mortal minds find its source.<sup>14</sup> But this justification cannot provide for the identity of God. We can establish the necessity for an eternal mind without being able to identify such a mind should God's mind be embodied and found in a corporeal body. Defining that God is *the* uncaused cause not only ends the cycle of

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<sup>14</sup>The Greeks from Socratic times have suggested that our minds can know rational truths only because of the existence of an eternal mind. They believed that the eternal mind was incorporeal.



regression but also posits the monotheistic view that there can only be one uncaused. However, believing that God is *the* uncaused cause does not mean that the believer can identify God for oneself or others.

Again, it is easy to establish why it is believed that God is immortal but difficult to establish why there can be only one immortal-God. Confirmation of the identity of God is possible if we can establish a posteriori necessity, but confirmation of the identity of God cannot establish why there can be only one uncaused cause that is, without beginning and cannot cease to exist. Identification of God cannot confirm concepts such as monotheism. So the question is- can the identification of God establish the metaphysical claim that there can be only one uncaused cause. For only *that* specific being can be considered as a being without cause, without beginning and cannot cease to exist. Immortality is definable, but we cannot establish why there can be only one immortal-God.

### *God and Revelation*

Without God, (Revelation) God as God wants us to know him, cannot be known.<sup>15</sup> The question is, does any sacred text reveal the identity of God that can ascertain God to the believer should God encounter the believer? Again if the answer is ‘no’ then, all the information we have about God’s *de dicto* necessity without the (*de re*) identity of God only establishes the ontological need for God. Many who believe in God do so because of revelation. Knowing God is important, but knowing God as God wants us to know him is even more important. So the question is, why is it that God has not revealed any identity in any sacred text that can identify God. Does any religious leader have any information related to how they can help believers identify God? While we are created to know God, God has chosen not to reveal the identity of God to the believer. The question then is, whether God can’t or won’t reveal the identity of God? It appears that while the awareness of God is innate, acknowledging God is by choice that is why God has chosen not to reveal the identity of God. If identity is revealed, we *have* to believe in God, if and when God decides to show up, but if identity is not revealed, we *have to choose* to believe in God regardless of whether he decides to show up or not. What we know is that God’s identity is not revealed, but what we want to know is, whether God can’t or won’t reveal identity.

### *Created to Acknowledge God*

Plantinga in the A/C model<sup>16</sup> argued that we are created to know God, but not created as theists or atheists. Christians argue that humans are created in God’s image (not the other way around). Therefore, if humans are created in God’s image and the image can be characterized as being physical (size, shape, genetic and neural) from which we derive identification, does God’s image embody any identification? What image do we share with God, and can that image help us

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29 and Amos 3:7

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga, Alvin, *Warranted Christian Beliefs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 172

to identify who each is to each other? Consciousness, what is common between God and humans makes it possible for humans (who are beings that have a beginning and can cease to exist), to acknowledge God (who is a being that does not have a beginning and cannot cease to exist). Consciousness allows us to acknowledge who each is to each other without establishing the identity of God. What matters then is, to envision consciousness which is considered common between God and humans, to be multiply realized in non-neural brains<sup>17</sup> so both can acknowledge who each is to each other.

John Calvin argued that we are created to know God—*sensus divinitatus*.<sup>18</sup> But the question remains, can the fact that we are created to know God help us to identify who God is. If we are created to know about God—shouldn't all be able to believe in God and be able to identify God as God—should God show up? Are particular individuals given extra knowledge about God before they can identify God? The only attribute that is common to most believers about God is the notion of immortality—believers seem to agree that immortality is associated with God. Two points can be raised here—(1) immortality by definition simply means something that is birthless and deathless—it does not mean that there is only one such being. (2) Immortality is not an observable basis for identification. We can choose to believe or disbelieve in God though we may not necessarily choose to know about God. If Calvin is right when he argued that we are created to know God, why then do we have to choose to believe or disbelieve in the existence of God when we do not necessarily choose to know about the essence of God. Since the essence of God does not carry with it any identification for God then God can be accepted or rejected based on the essence of God alone—that is why it is an either/or option according to Kierkegaard.<sup>19</sup> Because we do not have any basis for identity associated with God, both Theists and Atheists can affirm their decision for or against God even if the invisible God becomes visible.

### **Creator/Creature Paradox**

The creature/creator paradox is similar to the Electra paradox.<sup>20</sup> We can know about God without knowing whether we can identify God should we encounter God. The idea of causal necessity posits the need for a causal being without demanding the need to know the identity of the causal being. Without the awareness and recognition of the differences between the creature and the creator, God would only be a being who had qualities of immortality and creatorship. The common consciousness we share with God allows us to recognize that God

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<sup>17</sup> Hilary Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States" David Chalmers, *Philosophy of Mind*, (new York: Oxford University press, 2002) 164

<sup>18</sup> Plantinga, Alvin, *Warranted Christian Beliefs* 170

<sup>19</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong. Vol 2 (.New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1987) 176

<sup>20</sup> The paradox that we may know something to be true of an subject or object in one situation but not in another, as when Electra knew that Orestes was her brother but did not realise that the man in front of her was her brother.

is a being that cannot have a beginning and cannot cease to exist, and humans are beings that have a beginning and can cease to exist. The awareness and recognition of who each is to each other are important. Buber argued that God's need for us is just as much as our need for God.<sup>21</sup> For how can we need God if God did not need us? We can have a man/woman without a child, but we cannot have a father/mother without a child. Similarly, we can have an immortal being without a believer, but we cannot have God without a believer. God is a title given by the believer to the concept and reality of God. The paradox is that common consciousness allows us to recognize who God is without establishing the identity of God. Both the creature and the creator are aware and can choose to recognize who each is to each other independent of the possible encounter between the creator and the creature.

### Conclusion

To conclude, it is easy to establish the need for a creator-God (cause for cosmology) but difficult to establish the identity of the creator-God without God revealing what that identity might be. It is even more difficult to establish why there is only one creator-God because it is harder to establish what that identity might be for such a being. If it is true that God's identity is not revealed in any sacred text, then, it could imply that there is a reason why God's identity is not a given. It is not what we know about God that matters. What matters most is to know what God wants us to know about God, and this must include- what God does not want us to know about God. The fact that God chooses not to reveal God's identity implies that we must choose to believe or disbelieve in God independent of establishing the identity of God. The essence of God, not the identity of God is the basis for belief.

Again, it is easy to establish why God is considered to be immortal (the question of regression) but hard to establish why there can be only one immortal God. The concept of immortality is definable but not identifiable. The belief that God is immortal cannot identify God for the believer. God like gold is definable, but God, unlike gold is not identifiable. So the query of whether God exists or necessarily exists is as important as the query, can the believer identify God should God encounter the believer? From what we know about God we cannot identify God. The only thing that we can be certain about God according to Epicurus is that God is immortal- a being without beginning that cannot cease to exist. However, both revelation and reason only dictate the need for a non-contingent or necessary being without being able to ascribe any identity for the concept of immortality. If the essence of God cannot provide the identity of God, then we must conclude that God is definable and believable but not identifiable.

*Necessity* related to causality, *apriority*, or analyticity can only posit the ontological need for God. However, establishing ontological necessity does not provide any information related to the ontological identity of God. Establishing

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Buber, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958) 82

the identity of God requires establishing *a posteriori* necessity, however, even if *a posterior* identification is established, we cannot establish the metaphysical claim why there can be only one being without cause or beginning and cannot cease to exist. When we realize that the question of identity is the basis of only establishing the reality of God and not the basis for establishing the truth of one creator-God or one immortal-God, we understand the significance of why God is definable and believable independent of addressing the identity of God.

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